

APPROACHING FALLINGWATER:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF PLACE

A Thesis Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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May 1998

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May 1998

164 pages

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Fallingwater, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, has always been more than just a house. It has also functioned as a workplace, a tourist destination, “the best all-time work of American architecture,” and a cultural symbol. By talking to some of the people involved in its history and by examining “autho-ethnographic” texts found within the community, I attempt to use ethnographic methods to understand a complicated site.

Nestled in the rural Appalachian foothills of southwestern Pennsylvania, Fallingwater is also isolated. It is tempting for visitors to view it as a work of art “plopped down in the middle of nowhere.” And yet Fallingwater is fundamentally related to its site, both in its use of local materials and the place it holds in local memory. An attempt is made to connect this one place to a broader cultural landscape, and to understand the social and historic currents that led to its construction and eventual elevation to tourist icon.

For data, I rely primarily upon tape-recorded interviews conducted while working as an oral history intern at Fallingwater in the summer of 1997. Local perceptions of Fallingwater and the creative role local builders played in construction are examined, with the author concluding that at a site such as Fallingwater, sole responsibility for the creativity of the finished architectural form cannot be attributed to the mind of a lone

creator. The author examines local manifestations of modern architecture in the vernacular landscape, and concludes that local builders struggled with the same forces of Modernity that influenced famous high-style modernist architects such as Wright.

The project's scope reaches beyond the historical constraints of the initial oral history project, however, to include an ethnographic analysis of competing contemporary tourist landscapes at Fallingwater and at neighboring Ohiopyle State Park. While Ohiopyle offers an individualized, vernacular tourist experience, Fallingwater is experienced in a highly ritualized way. The ritual of experiencing Fallingwater is designed to effect change in the visitor and to spur the visitor on to environmental awareness and action.

The author contends that an ethnographic analysis of Fallingwater allows for the humane consideration of a larger cultural phenomenon, Modernity. By examining local manifestations of broader cultural forces, the author contends that folklore has a contribution to make to cultural analysis. By closely examining the "texts" collected by folklorists—however broadly those texts are defined—a more contextual understanding of broader cultural phenomena may be obtained.

INTRODUCTION: Getting In

Where's the entrance?

How do you get in?

Which side is the front?

Only ticketed tourists with advance reservations are supposed to experience Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater in its present incarnation as house museum. No system, however, is perfect. Part of a larger nature preserve and state Scenic Rivers System, Fallingwater cannot be completely cut off from the surrounding landscape, fenced off as a compound. As a consequence, hikers sometimes stumble upon it, or would-be pilgrims who did not call in advance, who do not obey signs, or who will not be deterred find their way onto the grounds. These after-hours visitors, before being apprehended by the night watchman, attempt to experience Fallingwater without the aid of interpretive staff and without progressing on the designated pilgrimage route of Ticket Booth, Visitor Center, Entrance Hike, Guided Tour, Membership Pitch, Gift Shop. Left to their own devices, they cannot find the front door.

Wright's houses are notorious for elusive entrances. First-time visitors do not know how to get in. An ethnographer attempting to understand one of these places might ask similar questions: at a house that looks radically different from each subtle shift in vantage point, where is the front? How do you get in? What *is* this place?

This thesis is an ethnography of place. Ethnography, “the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one’s own experience in the world of these others” is usually used to understand broad cultural practices in small communities (VanMaanen 1988:iv). Less frequently are its methods applied to objects of material culture. Houses, rich stores of cultural meaning, suggest themselves as ideal subjects for an ethnographic approach.¹ And yet Fallingwater has always been more than just a house, functioning also as a tourist site, a workplace, a cultural symbol. Like the Eiffel Tower, which Roland Barthes describes as being an essentially neutral form onto which meaning is constantly ascribed without this meaning ever being finite and fixed (Barthes 1979:5), Fallingwater’s symbolic meanings constantly shift, experienced and interpreted by different people in different ways.

How, then to approach a subject without an immediately identifiable center? In this thesis I attempt an ethnographic approach to a place that has become a cultural icon. “Place” has long had a place within folklore studies as an area of interest: concern for the nature and character of the oral literature of specific locations was one of the motivations behind the founding of the discipline. In its modern incarnation as an “ethnographic discipline,” folklore scholarship is often grounded in “fieldwork”: diverse data that, if it shares nothing else, is gathered on excursions to a geographically-defined “field,” a place.

Despite this inherent concern for place in folklore scholarship, relatively few works deal expressly and explicitly with place. Fewer still outline methodologies for such an attempt. Place is always present, but often relegated to a supporting role as “context.”²

For my “data,” I rely primarily on tape-recorded interviews conducted while working as an oral history intern at Fallingwater.³ An attempt to record experiences of Fallingwater construction workers and household staff, the project as originally conceived may be seen as an attempt to enter Fallingwater through the workers’ entrance. Such an approach comfortably fits folklore’s ideologies and methods while filling a void in the vast literature that has developed around both Fallingwater and Wright’s houses in general. Interpretations abound, but while heavy on symbolism, they are often weak on describing the houses as people experience them.

An oral history-based approach that focuses only on the construction of Fallingwater and its relatively brief incarnation as a weekend residence, however, fails to examine Fallingwater’s complexity as a site. Additional approaches to Fallingwater suggest themselves:

- *Through the tourist’s turnstile:* Fallingwater as experienced by its paying visitors, who move through the site on a formal, ritualized pilgrimage path which is notably different from the vernacular experience of the surrounding tourist landscape.
- *Through the employees’ entrance:* the house as presented by a highly trained, professional interpretive staff.
- *Through the main entrance:* the house as remembered and memorialized by its original owners, the Kaufmanns, and their friends and visitors.
- *Over the fence:* the house as gazed upon its neighbors and the place it holds in local memory.
- *Through a layer of scholarly text:* the house as described and interpreted by architectural critics and historians.

Not all of these approaches are fully explored in this text, however. By nature of the design of the initial oral history project, my fieldwork is undeniably skewed toward builders and local residents. And yet throughout, I have tried to keep in mind the variety of ways the house has been approached and experienced. The experience of Fallingwater is the essence of this discussion. And yet there is no single “Fallingwater experience,” so it is the dynamic, varied nature of experiencing Fallingwater that is explored here, as well as linkages of this one place to a larger cultural landscape.

The study of place is but one area of concern for folklorists, but to other disciplines it is the center. For bibliographic inspiration, then, I have sought out relevant works from the folklore canon while reaching out to ancillary disciplines, notably cultural geography and to a lesser extent, cultural studies, cultural anthropology, and the phenomenological school of philosophy. I do not pretend to have thoroughly surveyed all of the relevant literature in these disciplines. My attempt has been rather to find useful models that address theories of place, methodology, and the practice of ethnography. I have also sought out examples of ethnographic writing that experiment with form and presentation: an ethnography of place is either a stretch of terminology or an oxymoron, and therefore requires a consideration of alternate form.

This thesis is not “about” Fallingwater, a structure that has been the subject of books, articles, films, and other theses. I assume some knowledge of its appearance, history, and place in the architectural canon. Were I approaching a site that had not been so extensively examined, I might, as a folklorist, attempt a tightly-crafted effort of documentation and interpretation, drawing on models of vernacular architecture

scholarship.⁴ For better or worse, the subject is Fallingwater, the “best all-time work of American architecture,” according to a recent poll of members of the American Institute of Architects. Fallingwater, then, serves not as examined object but as reference point, touchstone, springboard. I am not attempting exhaustive documentation of a particular place, but rather sketching approaches to a complicated site. This thesis is about writing, place, and folklore—and the relationships between.

“Getting in” may be impossible or at least ill-advised, but it is something both folklorists and after-hours visitors consistently attempt.



Figure 1: Postcard image of Fallingwater's interior.

And we went up this stairway, and I walked in that living room, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I was flabbergasted . . . It's what you'd see in a movie picture or something like that.

—Dorothy Barron, Mt. Pleasant Pennsylvania, on an impromptu 1937 visit to Fallingwater

CHAPTER ONE

An Illicit Entry

At least one after-hours visitor was successful in gaining entry to Fallingwater. In 1937, Dorothy Barron had just graduated from high school in the southwestern Pennsylvania community of Mt. Pleasant, where her father was the chauffeur for the town's leading industrialist. One autumn evening, Dorothy went with her parents to visit their friends Artie and Elizabeth Brown, proprietors of the Laurel Lee Tavern near Mill Run, Pennsylvania. Dorothy remembers it as a "rough place" that also hosted weekly square dancing. The Laurel Lee—still in operation in 1997 and still the only place with a liquor license in greater Mill Run—"looked like it was good for quite a night" to young Dorothy Barron. "That's why we only went once or twice to visit them," she recalls, "and we always went straight back to the kitchen" (Barron 1997).

On their first visit to the Laurel Lee, Dorothy and her parents were introduced to the chauffeur for Edgar Kaufmann, the Pittsburgh department store owner for whom Fallingwater was built. Since her father was also a chauffeur, they established an immediate rapport.

We got to talking to him, and he said about being the chauffeur for the Kaufmanns and he came down there in the evenings just for some entertainment and to talk to the Browns. So, we talked about this place [Fallingwater] and he said, "Would you like to see it?" He says, "I'll take you up and take you through it." And of course we all got in his car and went up. [...]

So we pulled in there [the carport at Fallingwater] and he gets out of the car and he opens the door and we see him. And we went up this stairway, and when I walked in that living room, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I was so flabbergasted because I loved beautiful things and that, even when we came in

across the bridge, with it all lit up, and this white concrete on the bridge and everything, it was just like going into a fairyland. And then to walk up in that living room yet, it was—I was so startled as a young girl to see something like that. It's what you'd see in a movie picture or something like that. And it was, the couches that were built right into the walls had these big cushions on them. And they were all different colors, bright colors. She [Liliane Kaufmann] must have been very, uh, a decorator or liked decorating to go for the colors that she did, which were very coordinated and pretty, which set off the place because the walls were snow white and everything, and you had to have some color.

And then they had these big, the couches, and then you had the glass that went out onto a patio. And then the glass formed a thing where you went down the steps to the pool and the falls. And, they had these big hassocks out in front of these couches, beyond those wooden stumps, they used for like a coffee table. And they were sort of like to the side, and then these great big hassocks, that three or four people could sit on, they were huge big things. And they were bright colored.

There was a fireplace I think over before you got over to the door that went out into the kitchen. And then like I say, this, well, they would probably use it for a dining room table. But it had I think six chairs, there was two on each side and one on each end, and the chauffeur said it came from Egypt because I said, "Oh, it looks green-looking. And it looks like stone." He said it's real heavy. And I tried to, I touched one of the chairs and you could hardly move it. They were on that stone floor, you know. [...]

And they had all different throw rugs, even in the living room, he said from animals all over the world. There was bear skins, leopard, I don't remember what the other ones were. But I remember the one up in her [Liliane Kaufmann's] bedroom, I about died. It was pure white mink and it was, oh, it was huge, on the side of the bed. It looked like these white big sheep [skins] that you get in Australia. But real soft, it just, well I was even afraid, I didn't want to step on it. It looked like something you'd just look at, and you didn't step on it.

And the same way when you opened the doors of her, uh, where they kept their clothes. She had all kinds of clothes in there, different things. She even had a riding habit, with the little red jackets, you know, like they wear at Rolling Rock, when they go on the hunts. It's just what it looked like, like an English hunt outfit. [...]

We'd have never had access to it if we hadn't met that chauffeur that day. And that was just out of the blue, like that, going up to visit those people, and to meet somebody like that, and he takes you and shows you a place like that, it's just unbelievable. I never quite got over it, I couldn't believe it.

The crispness of Dorothy Barron's memory of her illicit tour of Fallingwater sixty years ago made an immediate impression on me. There is, of course, the contrast to the present guided tour where one cannot sit on the hassocks and certainly not open the closets. (And even if one could, there wouldn't be the vicarious pleasure because any clothing encountered would be merely a prop). Despite these differences, there is also an uncanny similarity: the experience of a ritualized tourist path. Dorothy's recollected tour follows the same path on which tourists embark today, progressing from the grand, public space of the living room to the more intimate, even cave-like bedrooms. Slowly the story of a family emerges, glimpsed through personal items on the dressing tables and books on the shelves.

In a text whose ostensible "subject" is Fallingwater, I give weight to Dorothy's account by placing it in a position of authority—it is the most detailed description of the house to be found here. I open with Barron's account for several rhetorical reasons. First, a confession. Despite claims to objectivity, this ethnographer, when functioning as an oral historian, is influenced by panache and narrative verve, qualities abundant in Barron's aural account and hopefully suggested by the transcribed excerpts. I am confident that my predilection for vivid storytelling is shared—but probably not frequently acknowledged—by other purveyors of this particular craft. It is one influence on the choices we make about whom we talk to and which narratives make it into our texts.

In framing my methodology as "ethnography," I use the term somewhat metaphorically. Ethnography proper is the province of anthropologists. Rooted in that discipline's history as a reaction to colonialism, it carries ideological baggage that is the

subject of continued debate.⁵ The archetype for the ethnographic experience, the trained anthropologist going out in the field to investigate and then write about non-Western, non-literate cultures, is a model that does not completely mesh with the work of contemporary anthropologists, folklorists and other ethnographers examining aspects of their own cultures.

Still, there is some utility in the ethnographic metaphor, and I have chosen to retain it despite the baggage. One strategy for dealing with the disjunction between archetypal ethnography and contemporary ethnography is the recognition that cultures practice indigenous self-documentation, or auto-ethnography (Dorst 1989:206-207). No longer is the literate ethnographer's text the only avenue for representing a culture.

Dorothy Barron's narrative is not a "pure" example of auto-ethnography, but I view its use here as an attempt to move toward an auto-ethnographic approach. One of my principal responsibilities as an ethnographer of Fallingwater is to provide a thorough description of the place. I cede that responsibility to Dorothy Barron's narrative. True, I have exerted authorial control: I sought her out, recorded her narrative, transcribed it, and now present it, in edited form, here. But it is a narrative that existed in the community prior to my arrival, and narrative, I argue, can be seen as an auto-ethnographic "text" even if not written down. Several years ago, Dorothy toured Fallingwater and relayed her previous experience at Fallingwater to a tour guide. The guide wrote down her name and telephone number, along with the curious notation "white mink, green table." The slip of paper found its way into a file of "potential resource people" and these names formed the nucleus of my own list of interview subjects. The version of Dorothy's narrative that I

include here is just one version of a story that existed in the community before my arrival, told and in all probability changed somewhat over time.

My most compelling rhetorical reason for highlighting Barron's narrative, however, is neither her ability as a storyteller nor my own desire to cede authorial control by seeking out auto-ethnographic texts. Barron's narrative sets the tone for the experiential approach I hope to retain throughout: her account is not the flattened, generalized gaze of an architectural historian, but a personal memory, a specific experience grounded in sensory perception and mediated through memory—the very essence of phenomenology.⁶

Phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard has explored the confluence of place and memory, and more explicitly, the interplay between houses and memory:

The house will permit me . . . to recall flashes of daydreams that illuminate the synthesis of immemorial and recollected. In this remote region, memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening . . . Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days. And after we are in [a] new house . . . we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are . . . Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images.

Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonalities as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost (Bachelard 1969:5-6).

I see in the vividness in Dorothy's narration of a memory many decades old the "flashes" of emotion-laden experience that Bachelard describes. In these flashes—which Bachelard also characterizes as *reverie*—Dorothy recalls with clarity a meaningful space: a house, though not her own. Memory and imagination co-mingle—if ever they were truly separate.

Though one may quibble with specific points of her recollection—Was there *really* a green table? Was there *really* a leopard skin rug?—my interest is not in documenting Fallingwater—a task adequately undertaken by others⁷—but to understand how it is experienced as a place. Memories may change over time, but so do places. We do not have an exact catalog of every piece of furniture ever used in Fallingwater. Interviews with two fur trappers, Ed Danko (1997) and Roy Hall (1997), as well as memories of visitors and workers at Fallingwater in the 1930s and 1940s also indicate a change in the presentation of the house’s interior: in memory, it is more “rustic,” with numerous fur rugs and rough furniture, such as the tree stump tables Barron describes. Its frozen-in-time status as a house museum is a necessary fiction. A theme in the oral history materials is the disjunction between memories of Fallingwater’s appearance and how it is encountered on subsequent tours. Which is “wrong:” the narrative of memory or the fiction of historical stability inherent in the museumification of a dynamic site? Thus the power of Bachelard’s vision—in our memories of meaningful places, we are never real historians but always near poets.⁸

Moving from Dorothy Barron’s experience of Fallingwater from sixty years ago to a broader analysis of experiencing Fallingwater, another concept culled from phenomenology influences my thinking: what space is depends on who is experiencing it and how (Tilley 1994:11). “Local perception” is not monolithic. Others have experienced Fallingwater differently. The work of describing our subject now complete (though, of course, such a task is always partial and never *truly* complete), we move on to other perceptions by those with different experiences. The drone of the waterfall

Fallingwater straddles is constant, though never exactly the same. Likewise the experiences of those who continually approach this place.



Figure 2: Ruth McVay. Photograph by the author

You name it that has ever been done with your hands, and I think I have done it.

—Ruth McVay, Mill Run, Pennsylvania

CHAPTER TWO

Knowing a Place

Ruth McVay spends much of her summer in the garden. The large patch next to her house has all types of vegetables and a bright border of flowers. A smaller patch across the road and next to the barn is reserved for potatoes and peppers. Windchimes clang from the front porch and there is a constant twitter from the finches visiting her well-stocked feeder. Ruth is proud of her garden and the rich store of skills it embodies:

I have a bunch of flowers planted along the fence. They do not look so good right now, but I did have it cleaned up really nice for Decoration Day. And, I *pulled* the grass, because my hands don't get dull or don't lose their grip. And I have a way of pulling grass and I can make it look almost like you mowed it with a sickle or something like that. I can pull it and you'll look at it twice and you'll not be able to tell it wasn't cut with a machine

And, amazingly enough, I can truthfully say that I like to do that kind of thing, I do. Grandpap used to say, "Ruth, you're going to kill yourself doing so much work." I said, I don't think so. And he says, "Well, you work when you don't have to work." He said, "Who needs all them flowers." And I says, well I don't know if I need them, but I like them, and I have to help take care of them.
(McVay 1997)

Ruth's current home, her husband's family homeplace, is just off the main highway through Mill Run, Pennsylvania, past the Baptist church and cemetery. She is a life-long resident of the Mill Run area. Remnants of her family's homeplace still stand nearby:

Beside the steps there on the old homeplace, there's a great big spruce tree, like this one [pointing to a tree in her front yard] only it was a lot bigger around. My dad had planted it there, and it grew and it got so big. He got afraid of it and got my brother to go up in the top of it and cut a piece out of it, so it wouldn't come down you know and maybe fall on the house. But it's still there today.

The old log part [of the house], there's still some of that there. It had been a log cabin house with two rooms in it when they first went there. That's downstairs, you know, two lengthwise. Then when Grandpap and—Elizabeth was my grandmother's name—when him and her started to get their children, why, Grandpap built the kitchen and another bedroom up over it, so that gave three bedrooms there, and a kitchen.

Ruth's deep knowledge of the landscape extends from her current garden and yard—where she knows what grows best in every corner and how to properly care for each perennial, shrub, and tree—to include knowledge of the surrounding hills, fields, woods, and streams. Trees mark homeplaces, clearings represent abandoned farms, particular plots are associated with long-dispersed families. To the passing motorist, Mill Run is little more than a couple of churches, Dull's Store, Duck's Restaurant, a volunteer fire company, and Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park campground. But to those in the know, like Ruth McVay, much of the story of the place lies off the beaten path: “At the old Harson/Stahl place, that's where there's one of the finest springs. That's what feeds Bear Run and makes it good, you know, is these little side springs that it has. I know of about five of them and how good they flow.”

The landscape surrounding the town of Mill Run is significant to Ruth McVay because of its associations with family and community memory. To the larger world, however, Mill Run is perhaps best known as the mailing address for Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, the famous house built over a waterfall. Despite its out-of-the-way location in the Appalachian foothills of Southwestern Pennsylvania, over 135,000 tourists visit Fallingwater annually.⁹ A 1991 poll of members of the American Institute of Architects voted Fallingwater “the best all-time work of American architecture.”

Ruth's intimate knowledge of the five springs that feed Bear Run, then, is not an insignificant bit of topographical arcania: Bear Run is the rushing mountain brook that makes Fallingwater possible. Fallingwater's renown has not escaped residents of Mill Run. In addition to being a major source of tourism revenue—as well as some

accompanying tourism headaches—Fallingwater is very much a part of the local landscape. Ruth's daughter-in-law, Sue Rugg, is a senior tour guide at Fallingwater, part of a professional interpretive and support staff that presents Fallingwater to an awaiting public each day. Ruth's father, Clyde Burnsworth, was one of the local men who took a job on the construction crew of Fallingwater during the depths of the Depression:

My father and Lloyd Hay had been life-long friends. Well Lloyd lived there pretty close. And when he heard that they were going to hire local people to put in those forms for that cement down there, well right away, he said, well I bet Clyde could use some of that work.

That was a good summer for us, but it made it a lot of hard work for us children, there was three of us girls. And, we had to do a lot of extra corn hoeing and fooling around with looking after the animals, because Dad wouldn't always get home in time to do it, you know. And that's when I learned how to harness and hook up a team and have them ready when dad would come home.

My dad was very proud that he helped there. You know, they didn't use a lot of machines when they built that. A lot of that was done by hand where ordinarily now they would do it with machines. They couldn't get machines down in there. And it seemed like Mr. Kaufmann didn't want them to do too much tearing around with machines. He wanted it to look as natural as possible.

I think that is the most beautiful place to ever go in and walk through that anyone could ever think of and imagine.

Ruth McVay's perception of Fallingwater is colored by personal connection to the house and its surrounding mountain landscape. The work of her father's hands—hands skilled in the varied tasks required of a mountain farmer—helped to build an important component of the local landscape. Fallingwater's design and the innovative technologies that enabled it may have been cutting edge, but the labor that produced it was "hand" labor: shoveling gravel and Portland cement to make concrete, cutting stone, building forms. All were tasks in which any farmer maintaining a homestead would be skilled. Ruth describes her father's previous experience in working with cement:

The only cement work I know of my father doing before that was when they built our cave there on the homeplace. When my dad took over the farm, why he said they needed a cave. They had had one there, dugout place and walled up, but they always put a wooden roof on it, you know, and roofing paper, well, that, every once in awhile you had to re-wood it and put new roofing in it because it would go to leaking. It was pretty hard to keep a roof on it, you know.

So Dad called his younger brother down in Pittsburgh and asked him if he would help him, he was going to put some forms in and pour cement in and make a cement top on the cave. And then he would never have to worry about it anymore.

Ruth's father experimented with a new building technology to solve an old problem. There was some experimentation, however, in discerning the properties of the concrete-roofed cave. Problems with leaking and condensation were encountered and eventually solved with new sealing compounds and buckwheat straw insulation. Not a specialized technician but a willing jack-of-all-trades, Clyde Burnsworth approached the challenges posed by the demands of Fallingwater's unconventional design and building site with skills honed by a lifetime of building, fixing, and making do.

Ruth, too, values the labor of her hands as equal and in fact superior to that produced by a machine. Her method of hand-pulling the grass speaks of an aesthetic of hand labor informed by a tradition of knowing one's surroundings and of how to best adapt the natural environment for beneficial ends. To her, the mountains, springs, and runs of her corner of Fayette County are not pristine wilderness but an altogether human landscape. Her knowledge of the land is not limited to its topography, but includes memories of changes in its stewardship over time:

There's a place in that Harson/Stahl spring that big around [makes an eight-inch circle with her hands] and it just looks like its boiling, pure white all this time. That's why Bear Run is such a good stream for trout. Then there's another one on up at the head of it, the Ernest Shroyer place, and it's like that too.

What I could never understand, them people with all of that money, they could have maintained a lot of these here nice little spring houses. There's one at the Jim Hall place, and it flows into that. And the Hamp Shroyer place up there, and

the Ernest Shroyer place.

That's why Bear Run stays nice and even flow all the time, there's always a lot of water there.

Changes in land ownership and use have meant that traditional ways of managing the land are no longer practiced. Absentee landowners, abandoned homesteads, and large tracts of land acquired by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy as a nature preserve have put a stop to traditional land management practices. Ruth remembers, however, and so to her it is perfectly natural that a conversation about the building of Fallingwater should veer into discussions of springhouses and home building techniques, gardening and ancient spruce trees. Shortly after it was built, Pittsburgh's sprawling war industry beckoned. To use Leo Marx's phrase, the machine invades the garden (Marx 1964). Fallingwater, built of the labor of the last generation of small scale farmers to be steeped in traditions of hand labor and local land management, is a symbol of an integrated approach to nature and technology: an engineering and technological triumph to be sure, but achieved through hand labor and local knowledge. A wonder of the world, in the words of Mill Run resident Virginia Kessler (Kessler 1997). Or, in Ruth's words, "the most beautiful place to ever go in and walk through that anyone could ever think of and imagine."



Figure 3: C. C. Tissue Farm House, Bear Run. In use as a guest house for the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, environmental group to which Fallingwater is entrusted. 1997. Photograph by the author



Figure 4: Bear Run School, currently office for Fallingwater Gift Shop. 1997.
Photograph by the author.



Figure 5: Bear Run Church of the Brethren, in active use. 1997.
Photograph by the author



Figure 6: split rail fence, Kaufmann Nature Preserve at Bear Run. 1997.
Photograph by the author

CHAPTER THREE

“I” Houses and Odd Houses

It's all my life, my whole life has been there. I was born there. Where the spring is there was a little house, a three room house. My brother and I were both born and raised there.

—Margaret Scarlett Taylor, Bear Run native

Just north of the entrance gate to Fallingwater stands a cluster of three white buildings and a large brown dairy barn. The maps used to call it Bear Run. Newer maps list it as Kaufmann, if they name it at all. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy owns all of the buildings, except the church. Startlingly white, utterly conventional, directly facing the road, they stand in marked contrast to Fallingwater—tucked into the woods, hidden from the passing motorist. The Tissue farmhouse is even an I-house (two stories, single-room deep, central entrance hall), the celebrated prototypical rural American house form over which vernacular architecture scholars have spilled much ink.¹⁰

The Tissue Farm once belonged to Margaret Taylor's grandfather. Raised in a house on the property, Margaret attended Bear Run School and was baptized in Bear Run by the local Brethren congregation. Growing up, she helped her mother clean the original Kaufmann vacation cottage. Known as “The Hangover” for its perch on a steep bank over Bear Run, the Kaufmanns' first cottage at Bear Run was a prefabricated vacation cottage, closer to the main road than Fallingwater would later be (Hoffman 1993:9). Mrs. Kaufmann, Margaret recalls, was very particular. Animal skin rugs had to be returned exactly to their correct place after shaking. The beds lining the wraparound sleeping porch had to be made with square corners, their bedside oil lamps cleaned and filled.

Once construction on Fallingwater began, contractor Walter Hall hired Margaret as his secretary. She worked from a temporary shanty on one of Fallingwater's terraces, preparing the payroll for the workers and typing Hall's correspondence. Her future husband, Merle Taylor, worked as a laborer on the site.

With twenty to thirty stone masons, quarry workers, carpenters, and general labors on the site at any given time, things could get chaotic. And the site itself, shrouded in roughly constructed scaffolding and concrete forms, could appear disordered. "I could never imagine that it would ever turn out to be anything," Margaret laughs. "It just looked like steel and rocks, you just couldn't think that it would ever turn out to be what it is today."

In my opinion, I thought it just never seemed real homey. I know that no way could I have ever raised two boys in that house. They'd have killed themselves because they'd have hit into those rock ledges. You know how boys play and run. It really wasn't a family house, it was designed for adults. I never thought it would be a tourist attraction (Taylor 1997).

If the Taylors were not overly impressed with Fallingwater as a home, they remember the Kaufmanns fondly. Merle appreciated Edgar Kaufmann's down-to-earth personality: "You didn't have to be ashamed to talk to him." Edgar Kaufmann, jr.,¹¹ who inherited the property after both of his parents died, is remembered as kind and gracious. Margaret remembers the simple dignity of him taking off his shoes when he came to visit the Taylors' new home, which they constructed on weekends and evenings while living as tenants on the Kaufmann estate.

Fallingwater took on a particular poignancy for Margaret Taylor with Liliane Kaufmann's death in 1952.¹²

I went down to see her. They had her laid out in her bedroom just like she was in her bed, laying there sleeping. We just went down and paid our respects. They

had flowers, just the normal amount sitting around like she always liked. But it really made me feel strange, because they didn't have her laid out in a casket, they just had her laid out in her bed like she was asleep.

Merle Taylor continued to work for the Kaufmanns as an agricultural laborer after the construction of Fallingwater. Kaufmann eventually decided to plant much of his farmland in pine trees; Merle had a hand in planting hundreds of acres of former farmland. "All those fields that have those trees in them," Margaret recalls, "we lived there, my mother and father. I helped to farm all those fields. And they put all those trees in them after we worked to make them farm fields."

The Kaufmann's property was marked by a distinctive rail fence, which it was Merle's continual responsibility to keep repaired. "They had it on both sides of the road," Margaret recalls, "it was on all their property. They've let some of it go now, they don't even bother with it."

When Edgar Kaufmann, jr. turned the estate over to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in 1962, Merle Taylor was laid off by the new management. Although he eventually found a better job with the Highway Department, he has not been to Fallingwater since.

. . .

Perceptions of Fallingwater vary among local residents. Whether they like it or hate it, all agree that it is unlike what most consider to be a "regular" house.

Albert Bearl Ohler's father was caretaker at the Kaufmann estate during the building of Fallingwater, for which he hauled water and hot tar. He has fond memories of growing up along Bear Run: "It was wonderful, a nice place. Cool, and a nice trout stream to fish in, it was really nice." The Kaufmanns' old creekside cabin, however, was "more like a house" than Fallingwater (A.B. Ohler 1997).

Gladys Livingston, whose family ran a general store in Mill Run and boarded some Fallingwater construction workers, acknowledges that it is a unique design, “but of course ordinary people wouldn’t want a house like that” (Livingston 1997).

Gene Work, one of three brothers to work on the construction crew “really thought it was just another house.” Now, however, when he mentions to people that he worked there, they don’t believe him (Gene Work 1997).

Elsie Fike worked as a maid for Edgar Kaufmann, jr. “I didn’t know what to, I just—I thought it was an awful place. It didn’t seem very cozy to me. Yep, I just, all them stones and stuff. I just, you had to brush them off every week, too, you know, so there was no sand or anything on them. He always went around fingering stuff [...] How do you keep rocks clean?” (Fike 1997).

Beryl Younkin’s father ran Edgar Kaufmann’s dairy farm. As a girl, she played “endless hours through Fallingwater” with Dorothy MacAllister, the daughter of Mr. Kaufmann’s chauffeur, and Pat Hall, the caretaker’s daughter. They hid treasures in secret places, played hide-and-seek, and dangled their feet in the pool at the bottom of the living room steps. “I remember being overwhelmed by Fallingwater. It was different than anything I had ever seen” (Younkin 1997).

Like Beryl Younkin, Virginia Kessler attended Bear Run school as a girl and sometimes explored Fallingwater and its grounds with her classmates:

Oh, it was way out! We never saw anything like that. It would be like seeing your first airplane or something. I mean, it was . . . No curtains! Everybody had curtains but the Amish. But no, it was like, if you grew up in this community, you never got out of it very far. So if you went to Pittsburgh or something, that was far. And that house was something beyond imagination. Being built over a waterfall? Well who would ever hear of such a thing. It was just, you know, today the world’s traveling so fast, and with television, the wheels that people drive, you see so much . . . (Kessler 1997).

Ed Danko, a teenager in the 1930s, set traps all around Bear Run, selling the furs

to Edgar Kaufmann for use in Fallingwater. He remembers Fallingwater caretaker Jess Hall taking him down to the construction site: "I couldn't believe it. It was like a dream. You know, like Mars or whatever. But it was just, you didn't, you couldn't express the feeling. You never see anything else like that around here. It was one and only one like that." (Danko 1997).

Rudy Anderson, who lived at Livingston's Store in Mill Run while helping to build Fallingwater, remembers thinking it was "just a job." The plans, however, he remembers as especially difficult to read (Anderson 1997).

Peg Orndorff, whose mother cooked for the Fallingwater construction crew, visited the site often during construction. "I wasn't too impressed. I couldn't understand why anyone wanted to use so much stone, it was so cold. Why would anyone want to live in a house like that?" The Kaufmanns were considered "kind of strange" by local residents, Orndorff recalls. Edgar jr., an "artist," was considered different from "these mountain people." "It was kind of a strange place just like they are" (Orndorff 1997).

Dorothy Ohler lives just north of Fallingwater in a farmhouse that has been in her husband's family for generations. Her son, Albert, a maintenance worker at Fallingwater, is the third generation Ohler to work for the Kaufmanns and/or Fallingwater. Her response:

I think of a house with curtains and blinds and everything. When I got down there, it's completely different. I always said I don't think I'd want to live in it because it's so different. I'm just used to a plain old house. I think it would be awfully damp. But for what they wanted, they wanted seclusion. To me, it was never a house I'd want to live in. There wasn't anything wrong with it, it just wasn't what I was used to.

It was so far advanced when they built it. Those footstools in the living room . . . and foam rubber . . . and the silk across the lights. It was really different. (D. Ohler 1997).

Fallingwater could not be any more different from the “plain old houses” of rural southwestern Pennsylvania.¹³ The Tissue farmhouse is a particularly elaborate version of the local norm. And yet in its own way, it is just as much an aberration as Fallingwater. Far more people in Fayette County live in ranch homes, modified company homes, and mobile homes than in unadulterated I-houses. “Custom” homes are not uncommon, either. Bill Scarlett caught flack from neighbors in the 1950s for building a modern home atop a prominent ridge without a front entrance facing the road: its large living room picture window, however, frames both the Whigg Corner church and the family’s I-house homeplace (Scarlett 1997). Gladys Livingston built a log cabin in the 1950s with a spacious glassed sunroom, to “let the outside in” (1997).

Whether it provokes rapture or hostility, nostalgia or painful memories, Fallingwater has a prominent place in the local landscape and in local memory. Even gruff retired construction workers who worked on the site as young men frequently have framed pictures of it on their living room walls and keep scrapbooks of articles about the famous house. Many people have experienced Fallingwater: 2,700,000 visitors since it opened to the public in 1964, dozens of local men and women who worked on its construction, hundreds of family members of Kaufmann and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy employees. It is a handful of those individual experiences this chapter has tried to illuminate. Architecture is about symbols, and meaning, and interpretations. Fundamentally however, it is about experience: a particular place and how it is perceived, felt, viewed, remembered.

By looking at “Fallingwater in Context” I paraphrase Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s influential article in the development of contextual folklore studies (1975). While she was concerned with proverbs and oral tradition, I have been concerned with houses and meaning. By neglecting to study immediate contexts of use, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues, scholars have mistakenly viewed instances of cultural expression as “autonomous entities” with prescribed, inherent meaning (106). Meaning depends on context, on the conditions under which a cultural expression is used and experienced.

Substituting houses for proverbs, my concern has been to show how Fallingwater, as an elevated cultural icon, is experienced by individuals. By highlighting Ruth McVay’s long and deep interaction with the Mill Run landscape, of which Fallingwater is a significant part, I have tried to provide a context for one individual’s interaction with the house.

I have also been concerned with the polyphonic character of single items of cultural expression. Fallingwater is just a house. But as I hope I have shown, it does not have a single “meaning.” In some ways it is the equivalent of Roland Barthes’s Eiffel Tower:

[T]he Tower attracts meaning, the way a lightening rod attracts thunderbolts; for all lovers of signification, it plays a glamorous part, that of pure signifier, i.e., of a form in which men unceasingly put meaning (which they extract at will from their knowledge, their dreams, their history), without this meaning ever being finite and fixed: who can say what the Tower will be for humanity itself? (Barthes 1979:5)

By emphasizing local perceptions, I hope to add nuance to various interpretations of Fallingwater. By presenting polyphonal interpretations of Fallingwater’s “meaning,” I have tried to subvert the often flattening gaze of architectural interpretation. As Annmarie Adams demonstrates in her study of suburban Eichler homes as they are actually experienced versus how their promoters expected them to be used (Adams 1995), distilling experience is a difficult, but essential, task. Too much architectural

history is based on prescriptive literature, idealized drawings, architects' statements. There have been no shortage of pronouncements about what Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings "mean." In this chapter I have attempted to show how some people, in one particular place, have experienced and evaluated a particular house, Fallingwater, masterpiece of modern architecture, yes, but also workplace, tourist site, home.

Residents of Fayette County have been more than passive observers of Fallingwater. Turning from intangible perceptions to the physical form of Fallingwater, let us move to a consideration of how local builders influenced the form of the structure itself. Fallingwater is often referred to as 'Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater,' embodying his grandest architectural philosophies in its smallest details. Paying attention to the oral testimony of its builders, however, raises a question: can sole responsibility for the creativity of any architectural form ever be attributed to the mind of a lone creator?



Figure 7: Contractor Walter Hall, center, oversees masonry and concrete form construction on the guest house addition to Fallingwater, 1937.

photograph courtesy of Gene Work, Mill Run, PA

CHAPTER FOUR

Layers of Stone: Local Builders and Aesthetic Choice

You can see I got a lot of books on Frank Lloyd Wright. The funny part, very few of these books does it say anything about the builder.

—Jim Eicher, Port Allegany Pennsylvania

Jim Eicher is going through his stack of Fallingwater books. He's looking for the one with the picture of the fireplace he built in the guest house. A framed print of Fallingwater hangs behind the sofa. Rudy Anderson, his long-time friend and a fellow Fallingwater construction crew member, lives several blocks away from Eicher. A similar framed print hangs in his dining room. Both have collections of construction-era photographs.

"Their pride and joy," comments Mrs. Eicher. "That was when they were young, working hard." Both Eicher and Anderson settled in Port Allegany, 150 miles northeast of the Fallingwater construction site where they became friends. Jim married Rudy's sister; both Jim and Rudy continued to work in construction, helping to feed the seemingly insatiable demand for new houses after World War II. They eventually became partners in a contracting firm, Jim specializing in masonry, Rudy in carpentry.

In the lull between the construction of the main house and beginning the guest wing in 1937, Rudy and Jim took a driving vacation out West. One of their stops was Taliesen, Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture fellowship in Spring Green, Wisconsin:

Eicher: Rudy and I went out to visit him after the job was done, out to his place in Wisconsin, Racine, but that was quite a place [laughs]. It was all built by his students, you know, and—He wanted us, “Now you be sure on your way back to come this way,” he wanted us to build a house out there. Rudy said, when we come back, we’re going to go as far south as possible [laughs]. After seeing that place, it was quite a—We saw quite a few, we saw the Johnson Wax building, we went through that and the Johnson Wax home.

Gregory: But you weren’t interested in doing any work for Wright at that time?

Eicher: We weren’t interested in that. Oh, after talking to him, I don’t, he just. . . and after seeing his place out there, you know it was all built [his students], you could tell it was no master mechanic or anything (Eicher 1997).

In a separate interview, Rudy Anderson elaborates on his impression of Taliesen:

Well, it was weird, you know. The place was weird, the guys seemed to be weird, and they, uh. I don’t know... he had hornets nests hanging around, bird’s nests in there in his office there, and it was different. Of course, my wife and I, we went out in ‘90, I think about ‘92 wasn’t it? ‘92 or ‘93. We went out then, it was more or less a museum there. They still had a few students that was working on plans, but it didn’t seem to be much different (Anderson 1997).

Although both Jim and Rudy express pride in the role they played in the creation of Fallingwater, both maintain that at the time it was just another job:

Anderson: Oh yes, here’s another thing I wanted to draw your attention to. There’s that picture, from the paper—

Gregory: Yeah, from ‘36, ‘37, rather. So what was it like to have this in the [news]paper when you were working on it? I mean, did you realize at the time that—

Anderson: No, it was just a job, you know. It was a—never realized it was going to be so famous.

Eicher’s impression:

Gregory: So during the time when you guys were building the house, was it hard to see what it would look like when it was finished? Or did you have any idea—

Eicher: Actually, I don't think I ever gave it a thought. Because at the time I started, you know, I really wasn't that much interested in buildings, you know. It was just a job.

Both Rudy and Jim came to Fallingwater as young men wanting to learn the building trade. Both express appreciation for Walter Hall, Fallingwater's contractor, as a man interested in helping young men learn the trade. While they are proud of the work they did on the now-famous house and actively collect mementos of their involvement, read articles and books about Frank Lloyd Wright, and travel to other Frank Lloyd Wright sites, Wright—in his appearance, his demeanor, and his aesthetic preferences—is considered “weird.”

The above account is an attempt to frame ethnographic materials into a narrative. Choices have been made. Excerpts are pulled from longer accounts, details that do not fit the writer's present purpose are left out. Even so, an attempt has been made to show the context from which the information comes. False starts and syntax that make sense in an aural context, but not in transcribed form, have been left in to indicate that this text is indeed a translation from a verbal account. I have left my own voice in as interviewer to show my role in soliciting specific information. The intent, then is to convey not disembodied voices but to show something of the verbal context in which the information was attained.

Even with these precautions, the ethnographer's intent shapes the account. A narrative structure is imposed. It has been said that postmodernity renders the ethnographer obsolete: individuals, institutions, and communities are capable of producing their own “auto-ethnographic texts.”¹⁴ Let me attempt an alternate strategy in

coming to terms with aesthetics and meaning at Fallingwater: a layering of texts.

Fallingwater as Palimpsest: A Layering of Texts

Writing has attained a degree of permanence. Through publication, computer databases, and the institutions that maintain and perpetuate them, technology has enabled the preservation of a vast body of written texts.

Texts weren't always so permanent. Some of the earliest surviving written manuscripts are palimpsests, papyrus or parchment manuscripts with writing on both sides.¹⁵ Words and letters bleed through. Permanence is not expected. Manuscripts are used and reused, acquiring over a time a layering of words. The challenge to contemporary interpreters of these documents is to uncover "original" meaning. Or, more precisely, to continually invent new meanings since ultimately, recovery is impossible.

As the opening ethnographic account suggests, from the very beginning, Fallingwater has been the subject of popular and scholarly written accounts. The article Rudy Anderson refers to was published in the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* Sunday magazine while the house was still under construction.¹⁶ *Time* magazine ran a cover story in 1938 on Wright's re-emergence as a leading architect, with a color rendering of Fallingwater behind a portrait of Wright on its cover.¹⁷ In these articles as well as numerous interviews, writings, and speeches, Wright outlines a philosophy of architecture and offers interpretations of the meaning of his work.

In subsequent years, there have been additional layers of interpretation. Even those personally involved in the construction of Fallingwater, such as Jim Eicher and

Rudy Anderson, do not rely on memory alone: they have assembled their own collection of texts (books, mementos of visits to other Wright sites, photographs) which inform their understanding of Fallingwater. In this section, I offer a layering of texts pertaining to one feature of the architecture of Fallingwater, the stonework of the guest house. I will reserve commentary to allow the assembled texts to speak for themselves.

Text 1

From The New Columbia Encyclopedia:

Heraclitus, c. 535-c.475 B.C., Greek philosopher of Ephesus, of noble birth. According to Heraclitus, there was no permanent reality except the reality of change; permanence was an illusion of the senses. He taught that all things carried with them their opposites, that death was potential in life, that being and not-being were part of every whole—therefore, the only possible real state was the transitional one of becoming. (Harris and Levey 1975:1229)

Text 2

Frank Lloyd Wright, excerpt from a speech before the Royal Institute of British Architects, London, in 1939:

Let our Universities realize and teach that the law of organic change is the only thing that mankind can know as beneficent or as actual! We can only know that all things are in process of flowing in some continuous state of becoming. Heraclitus was stoned in the streets of Athens for a fool for making that Declaration of Independence I do not remember how many hundreds of years ago. But today modern culture has made no progress in that direction because we take no heed of that courageous declaration.

At least, or at long last, I have brought you this message; what we call organic architecture is no mere aesthetic nor cult nor fashion but an actual movement based upon a profound idea of a new integrity of human life wherein art, religion and science are one; Form and Function are seen as One, of such is Democracy (Wright 1939:45, 47).

Text 3

Architectural historian Donald Hoffman, interpreting the stonework on the guest house addition to Fallingwater:

Where the wall continued east to frame the terrace, [Fallingwater contractor Walter] Hall achieved some of the most beautiful masonry at Bear Run. The stones had the vital and fleeting quality of sticks floating by in the stream, a perfect expression of Wright's belief in Heraclitus: "We can only know that all things are in process of flowing in some continuous state of becoming" (Hoffman 1993:103).

Text 4

Photograph from the collection of Fallingwater construction crew member Gene Work, showing the stone work of the guest house under construction. (Note the long thin stones Hoffman attributes to sticks in a stream).



Figure 8: photograph courtesy of Gene Work, Mill Run, Pennsylvania. Circa 1937.

Text 5

Excerpt from a transcript of an interview with Jim Eicher, July 8, 1997. A native of Mill Run, Pennsylvania, Eicher started as a 19-year-old laborer on the Fallingwater construction crew, and by the time of the construction of the guest wing in 1937, had become the project's chief stone mason (Eicher 1997).

Eicher: When they started working on the guest house, I was laying stone at that point. I built the fireplace in the guest house. But I can always remember, Frank Lloyd Wright came there one time. And he had long hair, clear down to his back. He had a little cap, and a shawl on. He was a sight. [. . .]

Gregory: So was that, when Wright came on the site, what was that like?

Eicher: Well, he mostly talked to Hall the builder. As far as we were concerned, I don't think we talked to him there. [. . .]

Gregory: So were there plans you were working from? How did you go about—

Eicher: Well, as far as, uh, I don't think, as far as having a plan on the fireplace, I don't actually have any drawings of it I don't think, that I remember.

Gregory: So you were just told where to build it and—

Eicher: Yeah, that's right. It was right in a corner, and it—there was at least one other [stone mason] on the guest house, but I don't remember how, I don't remember how many was on the... Course all the stone was quarried right on the place, right, just up a little in the woods. All of the stone was quarried right there. They had, oh, sometimes, I don't know, 10, 15, 20 men working in the stone quarry.

Gregory: So they would bring the cut stone to the site where you were building—

Eicher: Yeah, right, yeah—

Gregory: With the stones there, how would you decide what to use where?

Mrs. Eicher: That's a good question.

Eicher: I've often wondered that, because once you start laying up stone, it all comes to you. Because I've laid a lot of fireplaces and stuff around here. And, to watch somebody, you want to know how they pick out the next stone. Once you get at it, it just, I don't know, it just comes to you. Which [stone], you know, to make it look right. I mean, you've got a big one and then of course . . . and on stonework, I usually try to get the bigger stone on the bottom, so it looks like that's, you know, heavier stone is carrying the stone. And then you go up smaller, but . . . I've done a lot of stonework around here, I built I don't know, several, I bet I've probably built 15, 20 fireplaces throughout, but I started down there, that was where I got my start.

Of course that was one thing, Hall, he would let you try most anything. I mean, you know, some people wouldn't let, some contractors wouldn't let you do that. But he was, he wanted younger people to learn, you know, so he uh, he was always willing to let somebody go ahead and, of course I remember, we were doing stonework and he never showed up until late in the morning, we got tired of waiting, so I started laying stone, and he let me finish the job ahead of him.

Gregory: So, was it hard, did like Hall have, or Wright have, was it a different kind of stonework than you were used to doing?

Eicher: Well, of course, before that I hadn't done that stonework. I mean as far as, it was about regular because it was different size stone and everything. Those were cut stone. I mean they had masons just all the way down there to cut the stone in different, they'd cut them whatever came out of the quarry, and then they'd get out of each stone whatever biggest piece they could get and so on, and then they brought them down and a mason would have a choice of picking out smaller or bigger. I used to have them all laid out on the ground so you could see what size they were. And then you could go and pick out what you thought you would want to lay next, to make a nice looking job.

Text 6

Ohiopyle High School, built in 1948, now in use as a community center. The stonework, by local master stone masons John and Dave Collins, can be seen as representative of an aesthetic standard for the local stone building tradition in the community surrounding Fallingwater.¹⁸



Figure 9: photograph by the author, 1997

Text 7

Photograph of Lyn Hall. Built in the early 1930s, it is considered Fallingwater contractor Walter Hall's personal masterwork.¹⁹ Located along the highway in Port Allegany, legend has it that the stonework caught the eye of Edgar Kaufmann, jr., and landed Hall the Fallingwater contract, after Wright's dissatisfaction with the early stonework at Fallingwater.



Figure 10: photograph by the author, 1997

Text 8

Excerpt of a transcript of an interview with Rudy Anderson, July 8, 1997. Anderson recounts the story of Walter Hall's hiring as Fallingwater contractor:²⁰

E.J. Kaufmann's son was coming through here, um, with a bunch of fellas. They came by Lyn Hall, which he was building. And, they says, I want to go back and see, because the stonework was like similar to what was on Fallingwaters. So, they went back and they talked with Mr. Hall, and asked him if he'd be interested in going down to build it, because the contractor he had was not dependable. So, Hall, he took right off. He didn't have a wife, his wife had died a couple of years before. He took right off and he went down there. And he stayed. Well, it went on a week or ten days and he wrote me a letter. He says, "Come on down." He says I've got a job, it looks like a pretty good job.

Rhetoric and Reading

Returning to Dorst's discussion of the role of the postmodern ethnographer: ethnographers have not ceded their relevance, but rather shifted the priority assigned to various tasks. Participant observation and informant interviewing, the ethnographer's traditional tasks, have been subsumed by the ethnographer's new roles. First, the ethnographer is obligated to act as collector, transcriber, and collagist, assembling the seemingly authorless texts produced by postmodern auto-ethnography. Second, the ethnographer employs the skills of rhetorician and reader, making sense of the assembled texts and attempting to discern meaning (Dorst 1989:206).

In this spirit I have layered the texts above. Some of my texts, culled from oral history interviewing, are hardly "authorless." Neither are they explicitly "postmodern." I haven't abandoned the traditional ethnographic tasks Dorst mentions, but I have tried to supplement them with existing "texts" in the community. I have attempted to create texts out of elements of the landscape, offering them as existing testaments to local building tradition. The Hoffman text, an excerpt from the most comprehensive published history of Fallingwater, is the existing authority on the house's construction, referred to by the builders I interviewed as *the* authority on the subject and representative of the personal libraries assembled on Fallingwater. Of the assembled texts the historic photographs from builder Gene Work's collection are most clearly autoethnographies, representing the scrapbooks and photo albums assembled by most of the workers I interviewed, documenting their own roles in the creation of Fallingwater.

The dichotomy of "collecting" and then "reading" should not imply that all value

judgments are reserved for the second step, however. Clearly, judgment is exercised in recognizing, collecting, and presenting “texts.” Because they are presented as somehow pure texts, it is tempting to pretend that the items in such a collage are a neutral assemblage. They are not value-free, however, any more so than a Victorian ornithologist’s collection of taxidermied specimens lacks the expression of a worldview.

Nonetheless, I now turn to explicit acts of rhetoric and reading. Why have I assembled these texts? What do they “mean”?

Frank Lloyd Wright makes a speech about the meaning of his architecture. He references an ancient Greek philosopher. A twentieth century architectural historian views the stonework at Fallingwater. He recalls Wright’s pronouncement, and interprets the stonework as the embodiment of Wright’s ideals.

But to what extent is the stonework at Fallingwater a “text” produced by Wright? The assembled ethnographic material calls any easy assumptions on this matter into question. Jim Eicher learned masonry skills on the Fallingwater construction site. He progressed to a point where he was entrusted with the masonry on the guest house addition. Professional master masons had been employed in the early phases of the construction of the main house, but were frequently frustrated by the job’s demands.²¹ In the final phase of construction, the point where the stonework became “the most beautiful,” in Hoffman’s analysis, responsibility for the stonework had been completely turned over to young, previously inexperienced workmen such as Jim Eicher. In Eicher’s account, he was given little direct supervision, but rather made aesthetic choices based on an innate sense of aesthetics that he has difficulty expressing in words. There is no drawn

plan for the pattern of the stones. Stone is laid out before Eicher. He makes choices, choices determined by a desire “to make a nice looking job.”

As Eicher and other workers recount, Wright was not on the job site often, and when he was, he seldom spoke directly to the workers or made comment on their work. Clearly, Wright is responsible for the conception and design of Fallingwater. I am not attempting to debunk a genius. My point is not to suggest that unskilled teenagers “really” designed Fallingwater, but rather to raise the question: to what extent can individual design elements, such as the pattern of the stonework, be attributed to Wright alone?

Walter Hall was hired to oversee construction of Fallingwater largely because of his demonstrated virtuosity with stone masonry. Clearly, then, he was expected to exercise his judgment in ensuring a particular aesthetic for the stonework. Can we attribute the artistry of Fallingwater’s stonework to him, then? He trained young Jimmy Eicher and others. But he did not hover. He allowed room for individual creativity. And even when he made specific demands, he did not necessarily have total control, as demonstrated in this account by Jim Eicher:

I know we had one stone mason there working. After he had a wall about, oh, two-thirds of the way up, Hall didn’t like it, there was something wrong with it and he wanted this mason to tear it back down and start over. The guy said, “And we worked hard all day to do this, and I’m not going to tear it down.” And he never did. It was just something that didn’t suit Hall quite right.

My point is not to make Hall out as an unskilled manager or to suggest he was unable to control his crew. The very fact that Fallingwater still stands is testament to his skill. Rather, the account above further demonstrates the inability of one man to exercise individual control over an entire, complicated building process. Hall, the man who

authorized the weekly payroll, could not ultimately control the final form of Fallingwater's stonework. How then can we expect more of Wright, a figure clearly peripheral to daily construction choices? Tales abound among those not actually on the construction site of Wright storming onto the site and ordering walls torn down and rebuilt to his exacting standards. According to the ethnographic evidence, however, this did not happen.

Ultimately, any responsibility for aesthetic standards at a site as complex as Fallingwater must recognize the collaborative nature of such a project. Architect, contractor, experienced stone masons, novice stone layers, quarry workers: all played a role in determining the final aesthetic of Fallingwater's stonework. There is at least one more player to be recognized, however—the site itself. The stone came from the site. Gene Work on the quarrying process: “They quarried the stone right above the house there. And, they were flat, coming out in different thicknesses: one inch, two inch, three inch, six inches” (Work 1997). The site produced stone of varied thickness, a variation put to masterful use by the collaborative efforts of the total building team.

Though local perceptions of Fallingwater, of Frank Lloyd Wright, and of the Kaufmanns vary, the previous chapter showed that there is a strong current that all are somehow “odd.” No doubt the house itself, with its violations of local building aesthetics, contributed to these perceptions. It is less regular than the stonework of the Ohiopyle schoolhouse, for example, which was built by local master stone masons schooled in a regional masonry tradition. Walter Detling, a stone mason trained by his grandfather, a master stone mason and masonry engineer from Germany, did some work on the Kaufmann estate several years before Fallingwater was built. One of his jobs was

to underpin the rock ledge of the waterfall on which Fallingwater was later built, preventing it from falling into Bear Run. He toured Fallingwater several years after it opened to the public, but was very disappointed by the “shoddy,” “rough” and “irregular” stonework (Detling 1997). It violated his aesthetic standards for proper stonework.

I single out Hoffman’s interpretation of the stonework at Fallingwater for exegesis not because it is a wildly aberrant or unfounded assertion. I choose it precisely because it is so typical of architectural history and analysis. Hoffman is a scrupulously careful historian—I admire his work and it has played an essential part in my own understanding of Fallingwater. The fact that it is so highly regarded by former Fallingwater workers is also notable. And yet, even within his carefully footnoted and tightly attributed text, interpretation slips through. Seen next to carefully footnoted “facts” these interpretations bear the weight of “evidence.” But are they? Is Fallingwater a text produced solely by Wright? Can we read into it manifestations of his philosophies?

Fallingwater, writes Lynda Waggoner, its curator, is a unique cultural site: “Unlike most historic homes which celebrate an important person or event, Fallingwater celebrates an idea: that technology, imagination, and nature when brought together in the service of man can result in great art” (Waggoner 1996:13). Perhaps because it is held up as an idea and not a place, Fallingwater attracts seemingly endless interpretations of its meaning and replications of its image. And yet it is with Fallingwater as a place, as experienced by individuals, that this account concerns itself.

To the palimpsest that is Fallingwater, I add this contribution. Its meaning transitory, it makes no greater claim to permanence than a stick floating down a creek. An ethnographic account is always of its time: this account is based on recollections of

old men who were once young laborers. Ten years ago, their stories may have been different. Ten years hence, they may not be telling stories at all. Stacked up together, the various texts of the Fallingwater palimpsest, of varied thickness and weight, create an intriguing composition of their own. Ethnography and masonry involve choices. Stones—or stories, or photographs, or “texts”—are collected, and ordered, and mortared together, finally emerging into a permanent form. The ethnographer seeks to order his or her chosen texts with the care the stone mason makes in choosing and ordering stones, exercising aesthetic choices to make of it all “a nice looking job.”

INTERCHAPTER: Illusions of Control

. . . rather than simply providing a backdrop for human interaction, the natural landscape is a cognized form redolent with placenames, associations, and memories that serve to humanize and enculture landscape, linking together topographical features, trees, rocks, rivers, birds, and animals with patterns of human intentionality.

Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (1994)

Compiling a list of interview questions is an exercise in optimism. The ethnographer temporarily adopts an illusion of control: I ask the questions. Therefore, I frame the scope of inquiry.

And yet, over the responses the ethnographer has no control. Although the requirements of the project for which I was being paid required that I eventually work the topic of conversation back to “the House,” conversations naturally drifted across the landscape. People spoke of springhouses and homeplaces, railroads and ginseng. Fallingwater, the house, lurked in the background, occasionally as the focus for a memory or anecdote, but more frequently on the periphery.

As a listener in the field, these ruminations on the landscape present few problems. Yet as a writer, a compiler, an editor, they raise questions: What do I make of these materials? Though rich in narrative detail and descriptions of place, what, if anything do they have to do with Fallingwater?

“Deep listening” has been my method. Eliciting responses in the field requires an intense engagement with the speaker. Through sometimes unfamiliar place names and person names, past references to unfamiliar events in local history, the interviewer must retain focus, offer encouragement, react appropriately to the emotional content of the story. While respecting the possibility of fruitful tangents, the interviewer must also occasionally guide the conversation by listening for and seizing upon opportunities to steer the topic back to pre-identified areas of interest.

In preparation for writing, an even deeper form of listening occurs. The words, preserved on audio tape, are played back and transcribed into written form, aural signals “processed” with the aid of a computer first into digital symbols and, barring computer failure, eventually permanent ink on tangible paper. Gone now are visual signals and the immediate context of the conversation. Bits of taped conversation are played and replayed as fingers struggle to keep up with the pace of the spoken word. Some bits are ultimately unrecoverable: garbled, muffled, or drowned under the groan of a passing semi shifting into low gear to make it up the hill.

Deep listening is laborious and time consuming. But also intimate. The world of the conversation becomes all consuming, a transient moment in time between two people prolonged and preserved. The words, just one aspect of the original exchange, are now all there is. To the deep listener, inflections and pauses and choices of words take on greater significance as pieces of conversation are played again and again. The use of headphones places the sound physically closer to the site of sensory perception than it was in the original conversation.

Thus far, “deep listening” has been my method, and it has produced the “data”—transcripts of conversation—on which my analysis is based. This data is presented as “real,” authoritative. People said this. I have proof.

And yet, my data, like all data, is constructed. I ascribe significance to the words people say, words that may or may not be representative of thought as it changes over time. Words that were perhaps never intended to be permanent. The words as they appear in this text did not always exist in this form. They are the result of labor, and judgment, and choice. I extrapolate on the production of my evidence only because ethnography, as practiced by folklorists, is so dependent on the tap-recorded interview and its resultant transcript. It is all too easy to take the production of this evidence for granted, and to overlook the effect of this process on the resulting analysis.

Knowledge comes from experience. Experience results from sensory perception. So far I have privileged the aural. I was employed to conduct an oral history project: the conducting of interviews and the production of tapes were the expected result. The subject of inquiry was limited to Fallingwater and its construction. And yet, as my analysis thus far indicates, particularly the extended quotations from Ruth McVay, a deeper sense of place is in evidence: people recall Fallingwater in reference to the surrounding landscape. Opinions of its utility as a residence, its beauty as a work of art, and the skillfulness of its craftsmanship, are made in reference to the human landscape that surrounds. As perceived by its neighbors, Fallingwater is both distinct from and connected to its environment. It is, in the language of phenomenology, a human

landscape inscribed with patterns of human intentionality, its placenames and narratives and physical markings forming rich layers of sedimented human meaning.²²

In presenting a bit of the wider landscape, I now move away from the aural evidence so far privileged and the security of the ethnographic allegory, that these words and these stories are data, that they can represent larger cultural truths.²³ My explorations of the surrounding landscape occurred on my own time, outside the scope of my carefully reasoned research design. I wandered. Hung out. Hiked. Took pictures. These pictures are the only physical documentary evidence of my explorations. I will base my analysis on them, visual cues to remembered experience. I will extrapolate these images into cultural symbols, render them icons representing larger cultural "truth."²⁴ But always in my mind are the echoes inscribed by deep listening, pointing me to particular places and influencing my allegorical choices.



Figure 11: ICON: A View from the Parking Lot, Ohiopyle State Park. 1997.
Photograph by the author



Figure 12: Ohiopyle street scene. 1997. Photograph by the author

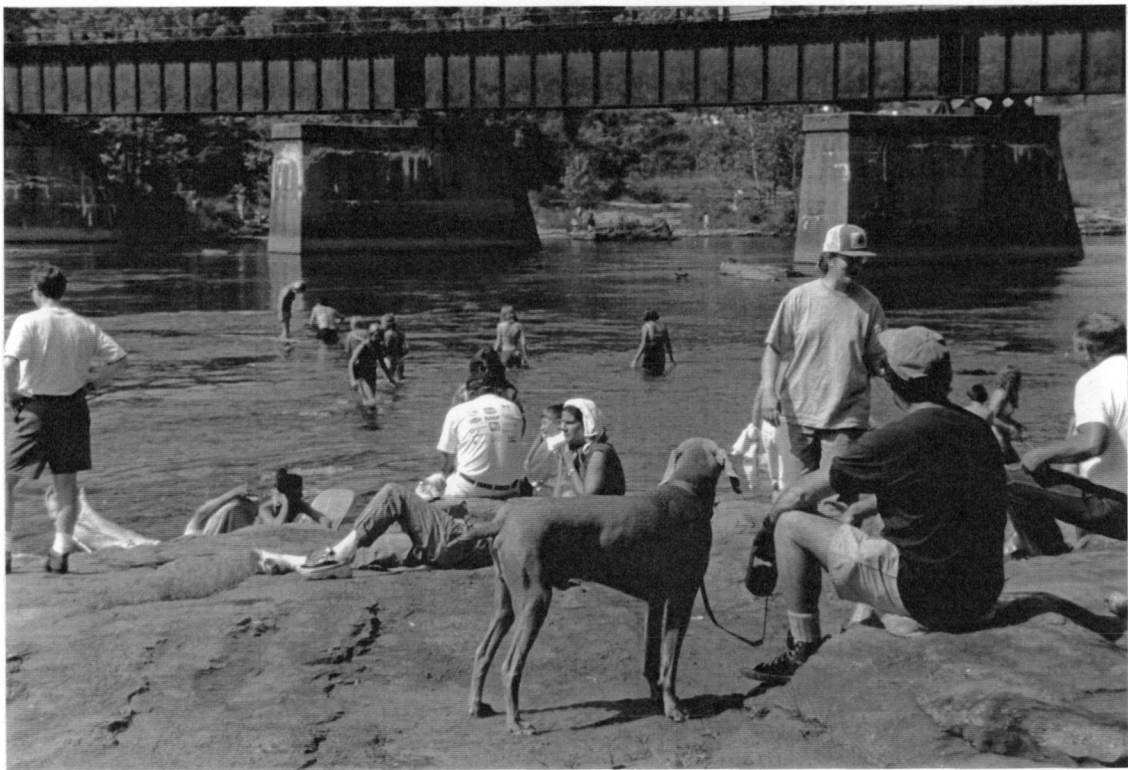


Figure 13: Vernacular recreation at Ohiopyle State Park. 1997.
Photograph by the author

CHAPTER FIVE

Ohiopyle—An Iconography of a Vernacular Tourist Landscape

Less than three miles down the road from Fallingwater is Ohiopyle: a borough, a state park, and most significantly, a place where the Youghiogheny River drops ninety feet in less than two miles, producing a spectacular series of waterfalls and rapids. These rapids caused consternation to George Washington in his 1754 explorations in the region, provided industrialists and town boosters with mill power and hopes for a prosperous settlement, and later attracted legions of whitewater enthusiasts, scenery seekers, and furtive waders, attracted by the river's sound, energy, beauty, and perhaps even the negative ions emitted by its rapid churnings.²⁵

To represent this place and to serve as an icon of its significance, I have chosen not a postcard view of the falls but a scene from the parking lot: bicycles on a rack on the back of a sport utility vehicle (figure 11). I choose this image not for its aesthetic value but its ubiquity in Ohiopyle's summertime landscape.

Like Fallingwater, Ohiopyle attracts many visitors, although visitors seeking a very different experience. (A rainy day makes this distinction clear as "rafters" find their way into Fallingwater's tours, their clothing and at times deportment marking their difference.) On sunny weekends, chaos overtakes Ohiopyle. Vehicles overflow the official parking lots and park on any available surface. Road traffic approaches a Los Angeles-level of gridlock as pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and portagers of rafts and canoes compete for space on the road. Unlike Fallingwater, which encourages advance

reservations and turns away visitors when it reaches a peak, Ohiopyle can impose no limits. It is always open.

Ohiopyle is not an obvious place for bicycles. The main road through town is a busy, twisting highway with narrow or non-existent shoulders. The borough of Ohiopyle, decimated by the creation of the state park, has few streets. Some bring mountain bikes to negotiate the rough trails on Sugarloaf Mountain. Most, however, strap their bicycles onto their vehicles and drive to Ohiopyle from Pittsburgh or Somerset or Greensburg to ride the rails.

The former route of the B & O Railroad, now paved with crushed limestone, offers a level riding path, linking Ohiopyle with neighboring communities of Connellsville and Confluence. Except for a few places where the path traverses old railroad trestles offering expansive views of the Youghiogheny, the striking feature of the bicycle trail is the lack of scenic vistas: the surrounding new-growth forest rises above and encloses the path, making it a long, level tunnel through a canopy of green.

As an icon of contemporary attitudes toward recreation in Ohiopyle, I choose the loaded bicycle rack. “Driving in” to experience nature on paths where locomotives once roared, modern tourists re-create the original Ohiopyle tourist experience, when Pittsburghers steamed in on the railroad to experience the falls at Ohiopyle. Now, however, the formerly utilitarian railroad track is a tourist attraction itself. Leo Marx characterized the industrialization of a formerly “pastoral” American landscape as “the machine in the garden”(Marx 1964). The railroad, the original machine in the Ohiopyle garden, has been replaced by the sport utility vehicle, a self-contained family transport system heavily laden with expensive recreational apparatus. Like the presence of the

railroad in the pastoral landscape paintings from the steam era that Leo Marx examines, what interests me most is not the machines themselves—bicycles, sport utility vehicles—but their presence in the countryside (Marx 1988:183).

My own vehicle with fully loaded bike rack has fought for a coveted Ohiopyle parking space, so I do not deny the obvious appeal of rail-to-trail conversions. I do think the practice of “driving in to experience nature,” however, is a useful illustration of the contemporary practice of “recreation as tourism” and tourism as a local as well as global phenomenon. These practices deserve brief explication here in order to more fully understand Fallingwater’s unique tourist experience and how it differs from or fits in with the surrounding tourist landscape.

My characterization of Ohiopyle as a vernacular tourist landscape is further illustrated by a close reading of a second photograph, a typically chaotic summertime Ohiopyle street scene (figure 12). A kayak and bicycle-laden sport utility vehicle rounds the corner: visitors driving in to experience nature, but bringing the necessary implements in with them. Pedestrians, bicyclists and automobiles compete for street space. Signs advertising goods and services aimed at tourists abound, but noticeably absent are corporate logos or national brands. Hagan ice cream, a local brand, is advertised, as well as hot sandwiches served at the firehouse: a working, active volunteer fire company, not a restored, quaint relic. A vernacular building form—an I-house with forebay and rear ell additions—is recycled as an ice cream shop and bike rental establishment. Though clad in the materials of mass suburban culture—vinyl siding,

pressure treated lumber decks, plastic resin chairs—the structure retains the scale and form of Ohiopyle’s remaining architecture from the pre-state park era.

Discussed in the abstract, tourism is often considered a global, capitalist phenomenon, flattening local difference and presenting an idealized, “themed” version of local cultures.²⁶ The scene at Ohiopyle questions these assumptions about tourism. Instead of a global corporate hegemony, we have a vibrant local culture, geared at capitalizing from tourist dollars, to be sure, but retaining local control of the tourism infrastructure. Absent from this landscape are chain restaurants and global entertainment companies. The river rafting companies, which control access to the river by novice rafters and have succeeded in offering “the river experience” as a ticketed commodity, are intensely local, frequently founded by contrarian back-to-nature enthusiasts, eager to make a living while dropping out of “corporate America.”²⁷

Tourists arriving in Ohiopyle in their loaded vehicles are free to partake of the surrounding landscape. There are no parking fees, and except for river excursions and ice cream cones, the tourist experiences available at Ohiopyle—biking the rail path, swimming in the river, hiking marked and unmarked trails—are all free. Indeed, Ohiopyle’s recreational landscape is notable for the vernacular nature of the activities and the freedom from authority’s gaze under which they are pursued. Park rangers make their presence known, but tourists swim in the river, dive from the bridge, and slide down natural stone “waterslides” without supervision or official permission (figure13). There are no signs marking these activity sites, except for a directional sign pointing to the “natural waterslides.” These activities do not make it into the Ohiopyle State Park

brochure. Still, they are intensely popular, and for many visitors define the Ohiopyle experience.

A recent study by the Allegheny Heritage Development Corporation indicates that tourism in Southwestern Pennsylvania is an intensely local phenomenon.²⁸ The majority of visitors to officially designated tourist sites in the region are from within a one-hour drive from the site. Tourism, which as an abstract concept conjures images of the two-week-long family automobile vacation or foreign visitors on organized package tours, is more typically a local experience. Places like Disneyland are one form of tourist experience, but far more common are the local places one takes out-of-town guests, or, the places the loaded family sport utility vehicle heads to on a sunny weekend.

If tourism is not always the global economic force popularly imagined, tourist experiences are nonetheless increasingly pervasive phenomena in contemporary American life. Dean MacCannell has written of the tourization of everyday life, where run-of-the-mill sites of economic exchange are transformed into touristic experience (MacCannell 1976:34). For example, the open-kitchen pretzel shop or fudge factory at the local mall offers not just sustenance to the busy shopper, but spectacle as well (a pallid, low intensity spectacle to be sure, but spectacle—purposeful, not-all-together-necessary performative activity—nonetheless.)

Driving into Ohiopyle with loaded bicycle rack may be seen as a similar touristic phenomenon. As I have noted, the bicycle trails at Ohiopyle are pleasant enough: flat, smooth, accessible. Greenery abounds, but not necessarily spectacular scenery. Driving to Ohiopyle is an investment: of time, of gasoline, of money for recreational equipment. Crowds must be fought in the parking lot and at trail heads, and sometimes on the trail

itself. Presumably, many of these day-tourists are leaving ideal bicycling environments—the smooth, shaded, quiet streets and *cul de sacs* of suburbia—to encounter traffic, crowds, and a certain level of inconvenience at Ohiopyle. Clearly, these bicycle tourists are motivated by more than an equation offering the most possible exercise attained with the lowest possible expenditure of cash and hassle. By coming to Ohiopyle, the day tourist seeks experience. Ohiopyle offers a destination, and a “scene”: other bicyclists, cafes and ice cream shops, a waterfall.

I have chosen to define Ohiopyle as a vernacular landscape, then, because of the vernacular building forms represented in the town’s architecture, as well as the theme of recycling old buildings for emerging purposes and the noticeable local flavor and control of the tourist infrastructure. My definition of Ohiopyle as a vernacular tourist landscape also draws on the populist connotation of the term: these individuals are acting for themselves, making choices about their recreation and the environment in which they wish to attain it. They are not helpless dupes to a global corporate tourist hegemony. Ohiopyle’s tourists plan and define their own experience, spending their time and money to attain the necessary implements for their pleasure and leisure. In control but part of a crowd, Ohiopyle’s tourists are capable of acting as consumers and as individuals in their pursuit of pleasure.

Just down the road at Fallingwater, a strikingly different tourist experience awaits.

...

The vitality of the present scene of Ohiopyle has an air of inevitability. This is a tourist place, and by all accounts, it's doing well. People come. They spend money. They go home. But the recycled vernacular houses of Ohiopyle hint of a different past. Before examining the tourist experience at Fallingwater, let us return briefly to the methods of deep listening for hints of how this place came to be what it is.

My attempt in this section has been to perform an iconographical analysis of Ohiopyle by isolating an icon and attributing values and ideas to it. I chose a view from the parking lot for my own reasons, without consulting anyone. Symbolic analysis is an enticing game in this way. Aural evidence is not necessarily more accurate, nor less of a game, but it can be more grounded—and less vulnerable to the whims of the analyst.

Bernice Felton was born in 1908 and grew up in an area called Whigg Corner, midway between Ohiopyle and Bear Run, where the Kaufmann family would eventually build Fallingwater. Her father was a farmer and a blacksmith, and her family's property adjoined the Kaufmann estate. In 1963 Edgar Kaufmann, jr. donated Fallingwater and the large tract of land it sits on to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. The Conservancy, as it is popularly known, is a private conservation organization that began life in 1932 as the Greater Pittsburgh Parks Association. It has actively acquired land throughout Western Pennsylvania for the creation of nature preserves and the establishment of public parks. The Conservancy, with political and financial assistance from the Kaufmann family, acquired the land that would eventually become Ohiopyle State Park, one of its many such efforts in the region (Netting 1982:19).

Gregory: So, where was the farm in relation to, is it still there, is it a farm, or has it—

Felton: —oh, it's all grew up. The Conservancy took it over, and tore the house down, burned up all the buildings. The last time I was there you could hardly tell . . . if it hadn't been for a flower by the gate, I would have never knew where the house was at. And then there was a pine tree that stood in the front yard. It's still there. But that's the only . . . You can't, it's all grewed up into, the fields are grewed up in trees. You can't see where the fields were.
[. . .]

Gregory: Now, how did, let's see, did the Conservancy, they bought your family farm, or how did that—

Felton: I don't know how they got it. I don't think they bought it. I think they took it over for the taxes or something. But I know they come in and they said—I don't know who they told, my dad? I wasn't around up there but they come in and planted a lot of pine trees in the fields.

Then they come with the papers to come for my dad to sign. If one of my nephews hadn't have been there, he wouldn't have had any, not even a garden space. They had that he would, could just live in the house until he was gone. So my nephew that was there, he read and was looking at the paper, and he said—uh, that was my sister's boy—he says, Grandpap. He says this paper, if you sign this paper, he says, you're not even going to have, they're not going to give you enough ground to even make a garden on. And he had a horse that he kept to do his plowing. And he said, oh no, he wouldn't sign that. He had to have pasture for his horse. And a field to put something, plant something so he could have some grain to feed his horse in the winter.

So, they give him permission to farm a couple of fields. But I said, that's a shame, I said for them to take places like that and go in and tear the houses down and put the people out. I said, I don't know where those people went that they, like in Ohiopyle (Gregory: oh, yeah). They tore all them old houses down. All those antique places. See, on the right, from the bridge, clear down to the other bridge, there was houses. Stores, all along in there.

Gregory: Hmm, so Ohiopyle was a, Ohiopyle must have been a bustling little town.

Felton: It was. And they tore all that down, and then they took some houses on the right, way down toward the far end of town, it was old houses and that. Yeah, they used to have a skating rink there. And they had a merry-go-round when I was little. We used to go down to Bear Run, get on the train. Go up to Ohiopyle spend the day and then come back home. Walk from Bear Run up to our place [laughs].

Gregory: Now Ohiopyle back then, was there a lot of visitors then too?

Felton: Oh, there was a lot of visitors. They used to bring excursions from Pittsburgh up for people to swim in the river. I used to have postcards of people that would, that you know came up and went to the river. I don't know whatever happened. I left them at home when I left. I don't know what they did with them.

So that used to be a booming little town. See back in, when I was a girl back in the twenties, there was one store that bought posts and then they would sell them to the mines. Same way my dad used to make posts and they'd get a, I think they loaded them on boxcars. They'd get a boxcar brought in to Bear Run down there and they'd load a carload of posts and ship it to the mines.

Bernice Felton remembers a pre-sport utility era when excursion trains brought visitors to Ohiopyle, and freight trains took lumber and posts from the surrounding forests to further anthracite coal mining in the region. The machine was present in the garden from her earliest memory. She remembers Ohiopyle and Whigg Corner not as pristine wilderness, but as a human landscape actively farmed and used. And like the bicyclists today, the railroad's route through the woods was for Bernice a pathway to pleasure, taking her down to Ohiopyle for excursions and amusement. The rail route's purpose was not just recreational at that time, however, as it simultaneously served the transportation needs met by today's State Route 381 and the industrial needs which the road has also usurped, but in a more limited way, the county's natural resources no longer harvested at the prodigious rates from Bernice's youth.

My purpose in this section is not a documentary history of the individual real estate transactions that formed today's wilderness preserves and park lands in and around Ohiopyle. My interest is rather in perceptions of these processes. Like Ruth McVay and Margaret Scarlett Taylor, Bernice's perception of the transfer of farm lands to quasi-public ownership via the Conservancy is one of loss. A loss of useful, meaningful places. Resentment at restrictions and the abandonment or willful destruction of structures and

fields. While Bernice Felton is openly hostile to the Conservancy's presence, McVay and Taylor are ambivalent, perhaps in part because of their more direct ties to the Kaufmann family and the Conservancy through employment and physical proximity.

These narratives of lost homeplaces and overgrown fields express a perception of loss that may vary in its degree of bitterness, but that still stands in contradistinction to the narrative of progress told by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. The organization's growth from a private park and playground society for a rapidly urbanizing Pittsburgh to a large and sophisticated regional environmental protection and advocacy organization is chronicled in the agency's fiftieth anniversary publication (Netting 1982). There the acquisition of private lands for the public good is shaded a bit differently.

Conservancy historian Graham Netting's account acknowledges local resistance, but doesn't quite take it seriously, as in this passage where he admires the effectiveness of Conservancy land agent Carl Leathers:

In getting options from country people, Carl was a master. I have sat in farm kitchens in Muddy Creek when a farmer would berate Carl for trying to steal his land at a fraction of its value, and Carl would point out that the bottom was so wet two of the farmer's cows had gotten mired in the previous month. They might even curse each other in doughboy language until Carl would say, "You were born in '89 and I have a silver dollar minted that very year that I'm going to give you for your signature on this option form." Then he would sign, shake hands, and say he and his wife wanted to move to Florida anyway. (Netting 1982:95).

Though Netting goes on to laud Carl Leather's integrity, honesty and excellent relations with land owners even after the transaction, this seemingly innocuous anecdote is

particularly jarring juxtaposed with Bernice Felton's narrative of what she perceives as vaguely exploitative tactics used in the acquisition of her father's land.

Similarly, while Felton remembers the businesses acquired by the Conservancy in the creation of Ohiopyle State Park as "old," "antique" and "beautiful," to Netting they were "waterfront blight" (145). He recounts the Conservancy's ultimately unsuccessful efforts to win favorable opinion from Ohiopyle's citizens for the creation of a state park:

For a year or more longer, we endeavored to involve the community, but although some individuals were interested, most were disappointed that the Conservancy had not attracted hordes of visitors nor constructed a bathhouse.[...] In 1957, the Conservancy recognized the community could not, or would not, do much to help itself, not even to the extent of cleaning up the riverfront on the side of town . . . (Netting 1982:143).

Community cooperation with its efforts was deemed desirable by the Conservancy, but ultimately optional. When the community didn't go along with its plans, legal steps were taken to acquire property and create the park despite local opposition.

Perceptions of the Conservancy's efforts to acquire land for a state park diverge. The Conservancy's narrative is a narrative of gain: land is acquired, improved, saved. The local perception is one of loss. Both perceptions are informed by an understanding of "nature," a recurrent theme throughout this text. It becomes apparent, however, that nature means different things in different contexts, a Frank Lloyd Wright / Western Pennsylvania Conservancy / "modernist" conception of nature as pristine wilderness competing with a "local" conception of nature as a place in which people live and with which they interact. Listen for this theme in the aural evidence that follows, nature as idea confronting nature as a site of "sedimented human meanings." Returning to the

language of phenomenology, it is nature as backdrop versus nature as humanized and encultured landscape.

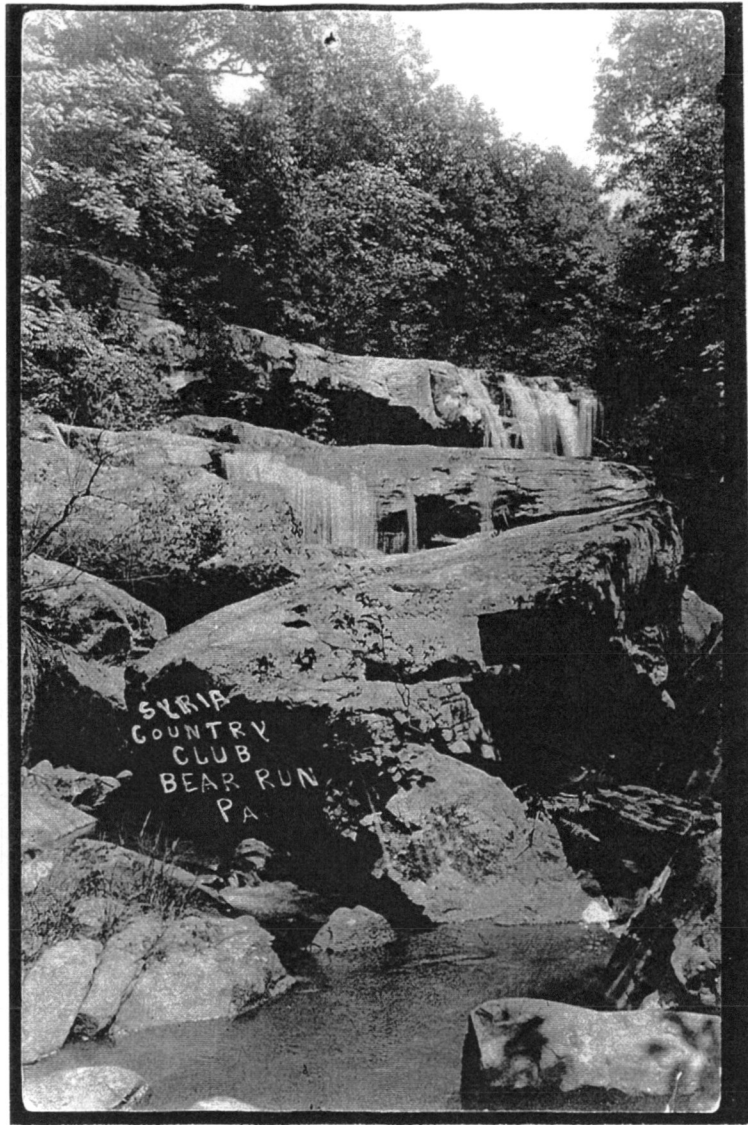


Figure 14: Postcard from the “Syria Country Club” era at Bear Run, 1920s.
From the Fallingwater archive.



Figure 15: Though the house itself may offer few clues to the unprepared visitor, interpretive efforts actively guide the visitor in his or her experience of Fallingwater. The famous “postcard” view of the house perched dramatically over the waterfall is not “naturally” encountered: it is a vista only visible from a designated, constructed vantage point. 1997.
Photograph by the author

CHAPTER SIX

Ritualized Fallingwater—Tourism as Pilgrimage

In the Middle Ages people were tourists because of their religion, whereas now they are tourists because tourism is their religion.

—Dr. Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, *Observer*, 11 December 1988
(opening epigram in Urry 1990)

Even before Edgar Kaufmann built Fallingwater, the waterfall at Bear Run and the larger tract of land it sits on had a history as a tourist site and a country retreat from the city. Beginning in the 1890s, a series of Masonic groups from Pittsburgh, a two-hour train ride away, operated the property as a country club. Beginning in 1916 Edgar Kaufmann leased the property and opened “Kaufmann’s Summer Club,” a vacation place where female employees of his Pittsburgh department store could “escape the heat and turmoil of the city,” according to a club brochure (Hoffman 1993:8).²⁹

The brochure also lists the activities offered at camp: swimming, hiking, hayrides, picnicking, sunbathing, singing, theater and “quiet” reading, among others. Postcards with captions describing the pictured activities were also produced. The printed words of the brochure and the captions, combined with the reinforcing images of the postcards, function to commodify experience. Activity is packaged as commodity—just as the words describing these activities are converted from action (verb) to thing (noun) by the use of the gerund. Spend your summer vacation at our club, and these “things” (swimming, hiking, reading and the rest) you will receive in exchange for spending

leisure time and vacation dollars. A generalized experience is presented, the words and pictures creating an expectation of what goods will be received. Invoking the language of Susan Sontag's influential essay on photography (1977), Elizabeth Edwards offers a similar observation of the process by which postcard images come to commodify the tourist's experience: "The act of photography or owning a photograph (postcard) authenticates and represents the *experience* of the possessor: it was there, I was there" (Edwards 1996: 200). In the case of the Kaufmann Summer Club postcards, the "it" was a generalized, commodified recreational experience.

The camp's activities were not limited to what could be experienced on its grounds. Excursions into the countryside were also offered. Bernice Felton remembers seeing the "Kaufmann girls" arrive every summer when she was growing up:

He used to have as high as 200 girls from Pittsburgh come up to the hotel.³⁰ And we used to go down around there after they come. The girls would travel all over the mountains up there. [. . .]

But there was a woman lived on up further, went up past our place way up the mountains, she would cook dinners and serve these girls a dinner that came to Kaufmanns. They'd go up there, she'd cook up a big country dinner for them (Felton 1997).

These trips into the countryside and the accompanying feasts were not an occasional lark, but rather a regular, important part of the Kaufmann summer club experience.

Experiencing the country, in a real country home, with real country food and real country people, was yet another activity incorporated into the club's program to counteract the "turmoil" of the city and its effect on the "Kaufmann girls."

The country woman Bernice Felton remembers was Elizabeth Burnsworth, who was Ruth McVay's grandmother. Ruth takes up the narration from here:

Because my grandmother, she used to have these here dinner on the ground times at her place, you know, and she'd prepare two or three days for this, and invite people there, in the summertime, you know.

And them girls that worked at the Kaufmann store in Pittsburgh, they would go up there to my grandmother's, they'd let her know they was coming, write to her, you know. And she would butcher chickens, and bake pie, and make mashed potatoes and cottage cheese. And have the best dinner you ever saw.

Now I can remember this, I was only six years old, when grandma used to do this, and these girls would go up there, and she would have all of these things prepared for them, and they'd have dinner with Grandma. And then if she had any extra cottage cheese or butter, or anything like that, then they'd buy some of that and take it back to Pittsburgh with them, you know, off of Grandma.

But after they got done eating their dinner, I still imagine I can see them setting around in grandma's yard like it was up there, I can still see them there as they would set around on that there—we had a little summer kitchen, we called it, where most of the cooking and canning and drying of fruits and vegetables and stuff was done over in this here little cookhouse like. [...]

But, they used to come and do that. Then when this meal was over, oh, she baked them egg custard pies. They just loved that. [. . .]

And, uh, these girls would all gather around, of course being a bunch of girls, they all were pretty good singers, and they'd sing "Mrs. Burnsworth had a farm, ei-ei-o" (McVay 1997).

To the list of Kaufmann Summer Camp activities listed in the brochure, add eating and purchasing. Sufficiently fortified and weighted down with parcels of fresh butter and good country cheese, the Kaufmann girls could return to club and eventually Pittsburgh with its heat and turmoil, having been provided with a restorative country experience.

On the surface, the pre-Fallingwater era of tourism at Ohiopyle and Bear Run share striking similarities: both had waterfalls, both had visitors coming in from the city on trains. But even as early as the 1890s, there were important differences in the sites: Bear Run was private, group-oriented, controlled; Ohiopyle public, individual,

unrestricted. Visitors arrived at Bear Run with expectations of particular experiences; the vernacular landscape at Ohiopyle offered a range of options but made no promises.

Over time these differences have only intensified. Ohiopyle became even more individual with the disappearance of the hotels, taverns, and train station, public/private spheres which mediated individual experience. Individuals now drive in with their own sport utility vehicles and choose how they will use the landscape for the day. State ownership of the land only makes official what was always vernacular practice: public use and ownership of the river and the surrounding landscape.

In contrast, the area surrounding Bear Run has become more restricted with the demise of the cluc and the construction of Fallingwater and its subsequent transformation from private family retreat into house museum and nature preserve. Instead of the vernacular jumble of recycled structures catering to tourists' needs at Ohiopyle, there are only two tourist structures at Bear Run, both designed by prominent architects: an ecologically-friendly visitor's pavilion and a certain house built over a waterfall. Now, instead of a laundry list of commodified experiences (swimming, hiking, excursions), the visitor to the falls at Bear Run is offered only one: Fallingwater. And it is a commodity experienced in a highly ritualized way.

By describing the visitor's experience as "ritual" and pilgrimage," I do not invoke religious terminology lightly or as merely as a more colorful way to describe a formal, controlled, or stylized experience. Both terms have developed highly specific shadings and nuances in a growing scholarship, despite their frequently casual and sometimes even sloppy deployment.³¹ Before making a direct case for viewing the

tourist experience at Fallingwater as ritual, it is necessary to briefly retrace the Fallingwater pilgrim's path.

If the Ohiopyle landscape can be characterized as individualized and unrestricted, Fallingwater's is marked by the surrender of autonomy—and the automobile.

One enters Fallingwater from the road, its presence marked by a roadside historical marker and then a discreet wooden sign indicating the turnoff for the entrance to Fallingwater. The wooden sign is in the same understated style as the sporadic directional signs located further down Route 381, which are inscribed only with the word "Fallingwater" and the descending number of miles to its entrance. Turning off of State Route 381 and into the woods, the visitor passes through a recently-installed stone and iron gateway evoking Wright's style. The visitor's auto proceeds a short way down a narrow, paved driveway, stopping at the ticket booth. Admission is charged, scaled on whether the visitor requests a regular, in-depth, or grounds-only tour. The driver follows some more discreet signs leading to a landscaped gravel parking lot. No buildings are visible. The visitor is instead directed to a wide, open pathway in the woods.

Upon entering the pathway, the visitor finally discerns a building, though its primary building materials, glass and cypress lumber, meld with the surroundings. The building is the Visitor's Pavilion, which features a central open-sided reception area with a series of attached "pods" serving the visitor's ancillary needs: restrooms, cafe, gift shop, childcare. These pods are connected to the central hub by covered but open-sided walkways.

Visitors check in at the reception area and are assigned to a tour group. When the group's tour number is announced, group members assemble under a sign marked 'Pathway to Fallingwater' and await further instruction. Once assembled, the group is instructed to proceed down the long wooden walkway, which abuts a rocky, stratified cliffside. At the bottom of the walkway, the group turns left (directed by another simple wooden directional sign) and passes a small field and then an old apple orchard before reentering the forest's canopy. Descending from the pavilion, the topography changes subtly: thick groves of deep green rhododendrons now surround, mature oak and maple trees rise to form a canopy. The air is noticeably cooler. Bear Run rushes in the background—though not always visible, its rush is always heard.

Before long, the house is visible, though the facade glimpsed is not the famous "postcard" view of Fallingwater perched dramatically above the waterfall—this is the house's more humble, above-the-falls facade. (A sign marked "view" directs visitors to the more famous vantage point, however [figure 15].) The group assembles on a small bridge traversing Bear Run, covered in the same ochre-colored stucco as the house. At the bridge the group is met by its tour guide, who offers greetings, introductory comments and a brief summary of the rules of the tour. The guide then leads the group to the house's recessed, discreet entrance, where visitors give their tickets to a hostess and check large handbags, video cameras, or large personal items at the door.

The tour proper begins inside the house in the large, open living area. The tour group, typically ten to thirteen visitors and a guide, makes its way through the house in forty-five minutes to an hour, gathering at a series of "interpretive stations" where key

architectural themes are identified and information about Wright, the Kaufmann family, and the house's history is provided. There are 16 interpretive stations:

First Floor: The Entry, The Hatch (glass-enclosed opening in the living room floor with a set of wide concrete steps descending into Bear Run), The West Terrace, The Hearth.

Second Floor: The Guest Bedroom, The Master Bedroom and Terrace, Edgar Kaufmann Sr.'s Dressing Room/Study, Edgar Kaufmann Sr.'s Terrace.

Third Floor / Canopy: Edgar Kaufmann Jr.'s Study and Terrace, The Bridge, The Canopied Walkway

Guest House: Swimming Pool, The Guest House Bedroom, The Guest House Living Room, The Carport and Servants' Quarters, Conservancy Lounge³²

Though these interpretive stations are not marked with signs or other distinguishing features, they are present in both narrative descriptions of the house and in publications. I have already noted that Dorothy Barron's illicit entry sixty years ago follows a similar path. Brochures and illustrated books sold in the Gift Shop likewise present the house through a series of photographs of the interpretative stations, in the same order they are encountered on the tour. Though as a form Fallingwater is hardly linear, as a space, it seems to be encountered and moved through in an invariably linear way.

Fallingwater's tour guides are paid staff members, and go through an extensive training and continuing education program.³³ Senior tour guides, for example, make annual trips to other Wright houses across the United States, touring the houses and discussing issues of interpretation with staffs from other Wright sites. Thought and resources are devoted to the interpretation of Fallingwater, and as a result, its interpretive program is considered quite successful within the house museum community. Rather

than being presented with scripts which they are expected to memorize, Fallingwater tour guides are encouraged to develop their own narrative, based on their own understanding of the house informed by extensive outside readings and a significant amount of time spent in and around the house during a two-week formal training period.

Since interpretation at Fallingwater is a dynamic process, it is difficult to “dissect” the narrative of the Fallingwater tour. Despite the freedom given to guides, however, there are key points they are expected to incorporate into the narratives they develop. These points are outlined in a training manual, which lists the following for each interpretive station: The Important Concept, Important Points, Background Information, The Wright Stuff (how the station embodies Wrightian ideas) and Further Reading.

The following excerpt from the training manual, from the Guest Bedroom section, gives an impression of the types of information that might be encountered in a tour:

The Important Concept

For Wright, every building should express the sense of shelter as well as the sense of connectedness to nature. Low roofs, broad eaves, room heights “to human scale,” and horizontal lines emphasize this.

Important Points

- Low Ceilings reinforce your awareness of the sheltering aspect of architecture, and fit Wright’s horizontal design scheme.
- Wright designed domestic spaces for human use, which meant that the human body occupied an important place in a room, rather than feeling dwarfed by it.
- The structural fold in the guest bedroom ceiling helps draw your eye to the window and outwards, towards the light.
- The Kaufmanns needed private space in which to retreat. Bedrooms all have private baths and private terraces. As on the main floor, the built-in furniture and occasional tables were designed by Wright; free-standing chairs are from the Kaufmanns’ collection.

Similar information is given at the other stations. After exploring the guest house, visitors are led into the Conservancy Lounge (the converted carport), where they are shown a slide show narrated by the late Edgar Kaufmann, jr. which describes the work of the Conservancy and encourages visitors to join as dues-paying members. The membership pitch marks the official end of the tour, after which visitors are free to roam the grounds or return to the visitors pavilion, cafe, and gift shop.

At a generalized, definitional level, ritual is made up of rites, with a rite defined as “a prescribed form or manner governing the words or actions of a ceremony.”³⁴ The progression of the visitor from interpretive site to interpretive site—with its prescribed and invariable linear order—might be seen as a ritual of experiencing Fallingwater. The visitor’s actions are controlled in the “ceremony” of experiencing Fallingwater.

Strictly defined in the anthropological sense, however, the tourist experiences I describe at Fallingwater are not ritual—primitive, non-western, magical “rites” performed to influence future events—but rather “ritual-like behavior.” When examining contemporary culture, however, the classic anthropological classifications of ritual make little sense: Emile Durkheim’s negative rituals (restrictions, taboos) and positive rituals (communion of the human and the sacred); Victor Turner’s life-crisis rituals and rituals of affliction.³⁵ Likewise the ritual / ritual-like behavior split: for all practical purposes, ritual-like behavior *is* ritual in contemporary usage.

Catherine Bell describes the characteristics of ritual-like behavior (or, as I argue, contemporary ritual in general) (Bell 1997:138-169). I list her characteristics below, followed by brief illustrations from the Fallingwater tourist experience:

Formalism

The Fallingwater tourist experience is highly formal, particularly for a leisure time activity: advance reservations are encouraged, movement is restricted to a formal tour group and path, and there is a prescribed order to the experience of the interpretive stations.

The rained-out river rafters mentioned earlier stand out precisely because they violate the usual assumptions of formalism: the rafter's decision to come to Fallingwater is a spontaneous reaction to the weather, not planned and arranged in advance. Likewise, their clothing and occasionally their behavior separate them from the usual architectural enthusiasts and "Wright fanatics," whose response to the house is often quiet appreciation and even reverence.

Traditionalism

The references to Wright and the importance of his architecture and ideas are important parts of the tour guide's narrative. Wright holds a unique place in the architectural canon: undeniably the most famous American architect, his work is seen as embodying "traditional" American themes: Democracy, Nature, Freedom. Touring Fallingwater is a cultural experience, and an essential, traditional field trip for many southwest Pennsylvania schoolchildren.

Invariance

I have already described invariable way in which visitors—both contemporary and proto-tourists like Dorothy Barron—progress through Fallingwater's interior space.

Rule Governance

Visitors surrender individual control and agree to a short set of rules in order to experience Fallingwater: even the most respectable-looking matron is asked to leave her over-sized handbag at the entrance. Though visitors occasionally react negatively to the imposition of rules—the ban on picture-taking inside the house, for example—most seem to accept them as a necessary part of the experience.

Sacral Symbolism

Like the work of Wright in general, Fallingwater is very well-known, frequently seen as embodying “important” ideas. Most frequently, this symbolism is articulated as something like “Fallingwater is a symbol of Man’s harmonious interaction with nature.”

The image of Fallingwater is likewise well-known, making it an important site for being “famous” in addition to any other associations it may hold. Booklets reprinting photographs of the house in the order it is experienced further reinforce the sacral nature of the tour itself (“Look, there’s the red cauldron . . . it looked bigger in the book!”)

Fallingwater’s multiple layers of separation from the surrounding landscape (entrance gate, ticket booth, visitors’ pavilion, entry hike) further contribute to its sacral nature. Fallingwater is not a drive-up attraction: walking is an enforced part of the experience—the boardwalk actually takes the visitor *away* from Fallingwater, the turn at its bottom points the visitor back toward the house. Not only is this a form of disorientation, it is experience for experience’s sake: the stratified cliffside and rhododendron glade the visitor descends through are an important, planned component of the visitor’s sensory experience. According to Bell, “. . . [R]itual-like action is activity that gives form to the separation of a site, distinguishing it from places in a way that evokes highly symbolic meanings” (1997:159).

Performance

The tour guide, delivering his or her personally developed narrative, is undeniably performing, sometimes up to six one-hour tours in a day.

In a broader sense, the tourist herself performs: a significant aspect of the tour experience is the physical action of moving through this famous space. According to Barbara Myerhoff, in ritual-like behavior “not only is seeing believing, doing is believing.” (Myerhoff 1977:223). The experiential component of the tour experience is integral, otherwise a video version would be just as effective. The body acts, moving through space, senses engaged.

If the visitor’s experience suggests that touring Fallingwater is ritual, the site itself makes a case for Fallingwater as pilgrimage.

The case for the medieval pilgrimage as the proto-tourist experience is well-established.³⁶ Tourism, in essence, is going *to* a place. Fallingwater’s physical isolation intensifies the journey aspect of the experience: Fallingwater is sought out, not stopped to on the way to somewhere else. In the language of binary oppositions that dominates the literature, the power of the pilgrimage/tourist site is the degree to which it casts into relief the difference between “our two lives”: the sacred / nonordinary / touristic versus the profane / workaday / stay at home (Graburn 1989:26). Fallingwater’s intense physical separation from the ordinary—along with the intense devotion with which many enthusiasts seek out far-flung Wright sites³⁷—only reinforces the pilgrimage motif in the site as a tourist experience.

Turner's analysis of pilgrimage (1974) delineates three stages in the *rites de passage* involved: social and spatial separation from the normal place of residence and conventional social ties, liminality, and reintegration. Like structural analysis with its binary oppositions, this dialectic feels a bit shopworn, so I won't fully draw out how this framework may be imposed on the Fallingwater experience outlined above (The open-sided pavilion, neither inside nor outside, is a liminal staging ground at which the visitor prepares to shed his or her normal social relations and become a member of an arbitrary group . . .).

Contemporary literature on tourism has continued with the religious idiom, though it has moved from ritual-and-pilgrimage to the language of mythology. The "myths" presented by tourist sites are now examined and deconstructed, following the work of Barthes and his *mythologies* rubric (1979, 1984, see also Selwyn 1996). MacCannell's work is part of this school. The modern condition, he argues, is a predicament of fragmentation and detachment: the tourist, in her quest for a pre-modern Other, seeks out places where the world is somehow more whole, structured, and authentic than in everyday life (1976:15). Following MacCannell, the modern tourist arrives at Fallingwater frayed and worn from his interaction with the ragged, harsh, automobile landscape of suburban sprawl. Passing through Fallingwater's elaborate portals marking its separation from the usual and mundane (even the ecologically-friendly toilets in the Visitors Pavilion are different . . .) the tourist basks in Fallingwater's mythology of connection and harmony. The cool rush of the stream, the tour guide's evocation of Wrightian ideals of unity and harmony, the house that looks radically different from any house experienced before—all contribute to the elaboration

of a mythology of humankind's harmonious interaction with nature. The success of the tourist experience depends on the extent to which the sought-after mythology is realized.

By expanding the definition of ritual and making connections between holy pilgrimage and secular tourism, my intent is not to strip ritual and pilgrimage or even mythology of their religious connotations. Though not intrinsically Christian or even strictly "religious," the motivations behind contemporary tourism are often interpreted as inherently spiritual. MacCannell on the motivations for tourism: "Sightseeing is a kind of collective striving for transcendence of the modern totality, a way of attempting to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience" (1976:13). Though MacCannell sees the impulse for tourism as fundamentally spiritual, he sees it as a quest ultimately doomed to failure: the wholistic, authentic experience the tourist seeks is ultimately unattainable, because in seeking "transcendence," the tourist constructs a differentiated "Other." The tourist seeks connection, but creates further division. The rhetoric of transcendence through experience that informs the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy's interpretation of Fallingwater, however, challenges MacCannell's pessimism. Fallingwater, it asserts, *can* change people.

The ritualized tourist experience at Fallingwater is intended to effect change in the visitor. The visitor's journey to the falls at Bear Run, like that of the Kaufmann girls of yore, is a pilgrimage, a sacred journey into Nature and its restorative powers. Just as Edgar Kaufmann used the landscape of Bear Run as a social corrective for the employees in his charge, so does the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy actively seek to influence

behavior through the experience of place. The Conservancy's mission statement combines its two primary missions—to conserve natural resources and to preserve Fallingwater—to create an ideology where Fallingwater serves as a symbol of the Conservancy's larger efforts to “enrich the human relationship with the natural world” . The Fallingwater tourist's experience begins with anticipation. It moves to experience once the tourist finally glimpses Fallingwater and moves through the house. It ends with contemplation and a call to action—an altar call of sorts—as the tourist enters the Membership Lounge, views slides of the surrounding flora and fauna, and is asked to take action: join the Conservancy and its efforts to “save the places we care about.”

On a busy summer day Fallingwater is a vital, lively place, not altogether unlike the summertime scene at Ohiopyle. Systems are in place, however, to ensure efficient, smooth movement of people through space while retaining an air of hushed reverence: every six minutes, a new tour group gathers at the pavilion to begin its descent down the boardwalk. As in my iconographical analysis of Ohiopyle, however, my examination of tourism at Fallingwater thus far is somewhat removed from experience. The relative silence of the aural evidence assembled so far does not mean that these vital, contemporary scenes are outside the purview of ethnographic methods, or that deep listening may only be used to recover the arcane and to document the disappearing. These lively sites deserve our full engagement and deepest listening. While a full ethnographic analysis of the contemporary tourist scene at Fallingwater is outside the domain of this project, let us return the aural evidence that *was* gathered. What might these voices tell us about the production of Fallingwater as “site”?

CHAPTER SEVEN

Fallingwater as Stage Set

If the narratives told by Fallingwater's interpreters are dynamic, the place itself is frozen in time, scenery on a stage, a tableau set each day by a staff of caretakers for the audience of tourists which comes through to experience Nature and Architecture in Harmony with Man. Vases are filled with fresh flowers; a fresh bar of Jergens soap hangs on a chain near the "footbath" at the house's entry. Pitchers and water glasses are placed on bedside tables, a tray of cocktail ingredients rests on a tree stump end table next to the hearth: it is as if the Kaufmanns have just stepped away and the viewer, like Dorothy Barron so many years before, gets a glimpse at the private sphere of these public people.

Though such touches are common in house museums today, Fallingwater was a pioneer in offering its visitors a seamless "experience" of a house, devoid of velvet ropes and protective carpets. Edgar Kaufmann, jr., in donating the house to the Conservancy, stipulated that visitors be allowed to experience it as if they were the Kaufmann's guests, and recent efforts in presentation have only intensified that impulse (Netting 1982:27-28). Yet even in its previous incarnation as a private weekend retreat, there were characteristics of the stage set in the maintenance and presentation of the house and the surrounding landscape.

As a teenager in the 1930s, Ed Danko trapped for Edgar Kaufmann, providing him with fox, mink, coon, and even skunk pelts:

Danko: But yeah, they took the skunks, too, you know. In fact, they had rugs made, it was, they made them down at Pittsburgh, the furriers. And they had them up at Fallingwater. They had a big one, it was made mostly from coon, that draped over the couch. And like I say, I don't know whether it's still there or not. [...]

Gregory: So these furs that you caught for Mr. Kaufmann, was that kind of an unusual taste for those days, or did a lot of people like furs in their house, like decorated like that, rugs and—

Danko: —I don't think so, no. No, that was very unusual. And I think he wanted something off of his own property to have in his home, like furs, And I'm sure that everyone don't do that. (Gregory: hmm). Yeah, he was very interested in that, you know. (Danko 1997)

Edgar Kaufmann took an active interest in the presentation of Fallingwater, working closely with Frank Lloyd Wright in refining the details of its interior. But he also made his own decisions, such as the placement of fur throws throughout the house, furs trapped on his own land.

Kaufmann also displayed a keen interest in the immediate landscape, justifiably fretting over dead branches on the mature trees that dangled precipitously over the house. But he also took an aesthetic interest, personally directing the maintenance staff in the pruning of shrubs and trees, to the point of indicating specific branches to be cut. (Friend 1997).

Kaufmann's close scrutiny and concern for presentation was not limited to Fallingwater and its immediate environs: he displayed a similar level of concern for the appearance of his adjoining agricultural lands.

Beryl Younkin's father, Reed Sparks, was Edgar Kaufmann's dairyman in the 1930s and 40s, taking care of a herd of fifty Jersey cow and maintaining the dairy barn. Mr. Kaufmann, she remembers, visited the dairy frequently, and was very meticulous about how the animals and the barn were kept. Stalls for the cows were painted white on top and Cherokee red on the bottom. The barn was washed down and the cow stanchions scrubbed each week, the floors were swept daily. "He was extremely particular about how his barn and animals were kept." (Younkin 1997).

Like the attractive but non-functional rail fences that lined the Kaufmann property that Margaret Scarlett Taylor remembers, Kaufmann's choices for the presentation of his working barns are remembered as markers of difference, setting Kaufmann's property apart from the surrounding agricultural landscape. Though functional, his agricultural holdings were also idealized representations of what he thought working agricultural areas should look like, maintained in a way that violated local norms and are remembered with some bemusement.

Roy Hall, like Ed Danko, was also a prolific trapper as a young man. "I trapped all over that mountain," he recalls "I know them woods by heart." And like Danko, Hall also sold furs to Edgar Kaufmann: fox, mink, coon, skunk. Intimately acquainted with the woods, streams, flora and fauna of the area around Bear Run, Hall remembers a time when Edgar Kaufmann kept Bear Run stocked with trout:

Gregory: Now what was Bear Run like in the 30s? Was there a lot of fish in it, or—

Hall: There was a lot of fish when Herbert [Ohler, caretaker for the Kaufmann estate] was over there. They had a fish hatchery. You know, the bridge that crosses the creek? (Gregory: Um hmm.)

Where the state road crosses the bridge is, they had a fish hatchery in there, Kaufmann did.

Gregory: So he had stocked the—

Hall: Stocked the creek. Oh, there was a lot of fish over there then.

Gregory: But there weren't any native trout? Just the ones they stocked were the only ones there?

Hall: That's mostly what they had. They didn't have no native, I don't think. I think he had mostly brown trout, if I can remember right (Roy Hall 1997).

The Bear Run watershed was actively used and maintained by local residents. Just as Ruth McVay recalls the care and attention given to the maintenance of the springs that feed Bear Run, so Kaufmann did his part to “improve” the watershed by maintaining its trout population. And just as Ruth McVay's grandmother's mountaintop homeplace and summer kitchen provided a moral tableau against which his employees could experience country wholesomeness, so was a well-stocked Bear Run an important part of the moral scenery of Kaufmann's country idyll. Not an avid fisherman himself, Kaufmann nevertheless devoted considerable resources to maintaining a wholesome, abundant, virtuous Bear Run, the lifeblood of his country estate.

Never a permanent residence, Fallingwater was a weekend retreat. The Kaufmanns were in a sense tourists on their own property, making the pilgrimage from Pittsburgh in search of nature and its restorative powers. With limited time to spend there, it was important that the staff have everything set up just right for their weekend visits.

Elsie Fike was employed by Edgar Kaufmann, jr. as a maid in the 1950s and early 1960s. She recalls the preparations that were made for Mr. Kaufmann's weekend visits, and the invariable order with which the house was expected to be kept:

Fike: The man that had the flower place, Mr. Green [Kaufmann's gardener], they lived down there, him and his wife. And he took care of the flowers. And then Monday morning after everybody left, then it was my job to clean up all that mess [laughs].

Gregory: Was there a lot to clean up?

Fike: Sometimes, yes. And they weren't too particular about how they left their rooms or anything, because that was my job. And he, the clothes that he wore, the shirts, he didn't wear fancy stuff, you know, just scruffy-like stuff. It was good stuff, understand, but not like a suit and light white shirt or something like that. And that stuff was all then left for me to clean up and press and put them back, just to exactly where it was before. Everything had to be put back where it was. Nothing was to be moved. [...]

That bookcase, did you see that by the steps? That had to be cleaned every week. I had to take the books down and dust them, had a little dust brush, make sure there's no webs or dust or anything on them. I had to do that. That's the first thing I done on Monday after I done the washing. Then I cleaned that shelf up, with them books on it. I think there's four or five shelves, I just forget. And uh, I had to clean them up and have them all back in place where they was. You didn't dare to make a mistake, put one up here and one there, another one in between the ones that they had, just like they had them. That's the way it had to be. Everything had to be put just right.

Gregory: Did they change things around very often, like did they change some of the paintings around, or pretty much leave things the way they were?

Fike: No, everything was just left like it was. Things never changed. [...]

Gregory: So was that [Mr. Green's] full-time job, to be the gardener?

Fike: Yeah, it was. If you seen how he put them [cut flowers] around, where he had to put them all around, they had to be just so-so, you know. No wonder he was bald headed [laughs].

Gregory: So he grew the flowers right there?

Fike: Yeah, he took care, yeah, they had them in that building down there. They had a place down there full of flowers where he [the gardener] lived.

Gregory: Were there certain kinds of flowers they liked to have in the house?

Fike: It seems, near as I can remember, seemed like more big-leafed things, and they had larger flowers on them. [...] And they was fixed just so-so. Then they was all took out, Monday morning flowers was all gone, everything was gone. Then I cleaned up the muss where they cleaned the flowers out. (Fike 1997)

Elsie also remembers that Edgar Kaufmann, jr., like his father, took a particular interest in how the grounds were maintained, personally directing which limbs were to be pruned: “If they didn’t trim it just right, left some stick out that should have been cut or something, he’d tell them about it.”

A full-time gardener was required to provide the necessary flowers for the house, part of a resident in-house staff that worked Monday through Friday to prepare the place for the Kaufmann’s weekend visits.

George B. Green, the bald-headed Mr. Green to whom Elsie Fike refers, was hired as full-time gardener at Fallingwater in the early 1950s, having previously served as a horticultural consultant for Edgar Kaufmann, both at Fallingwater and the regular Kaufmann residence in Fox Chapel. Like Mr. Watson, the man he replaced, Green was a Scottish immigrant and trained horticulturist.

Mr. Green’s son, George H. Green, first visited Fallingwater when it was under construction. He frequently accompanied his father on his consulting trips to Fallingwater, and visited often once the senior Mr. Green took up residence there. Although he recalls that there was no “landscaping” done near the house, Green remembers that his father did plant ferns and other native plants along the entry road. Moss was transplanted to the stone ledges behind the house. The Davey Tree Company maintained the trees near the house, and once a year, Green fertilized the rhododendron

along the road with blood provided by a nearby slaughterhouse. A crew from the volunteer fire company followed a few days later in their tank truck, spraying off the dried blood (G. Green 1997).

Despite the work required, Green recalls that under Edgar Kaufmann, “everything was kept natural.” The landscape was to look untouched. When Edgar Kaufmann, jr. inherited the property in the mid-1950s, he preferred a slightly more cultivated look: daffodils were planted along the roadside, an apple orchard installed.

Although there was a maintenance crew that did the mowing and general upkeep of the Kaufmann property at Bear Run, George Green and his crew of four gardener assistants were responsible for maintaining the corridor from the entrance gate to the house, in addition to providing cut flowers and vegetables for the Kaufmanns. This cultivated—though seemingly natural and untouched—landscape provided a veneer of lush green as the Kaufmanns drove into Fallingwater from the main road. Nurtured and cared for, this thin corridor of green was another stage set, a constructed natural backdrop against which the Kaufmanns could experience Fallingwater.

When the Conservancy acquired Fallingwater in 1963, they fired George Green and his men. They didn’t see the need for a crew of gardeners in a nature preserve.

As the above excerpts indicate, even as a private residence, Fallingwater was always more than just a house: there was an ideology that informed its presentation. Aesthetic choices were made to reinforce the ideals that Fallingwater was believed to represent. In a larger sense, the very structure of the house itself may be seen as the creation of an elaborate stage set for the drama of the Kaufmann family. A component of

Frank Lloyd Wright's organic architecture was that it should reflect the needs of its users, and Wright spent considerable time discussing and corresponding with the Kaufmanns about how they spent their leisure time at Bear Run (Hoffman 1993:11-25). The structure of the completed house—its terraces, plunge pools, informal layout—are Wright's attempts to embody the family's leisure activities—sunning, swimming, impromptu hikes in the woods—in physical form. Like the postcard images of the Kaufmann Summer Club, in which transitory activity is objectified in the physical form of the postcard, so does Fallingwater as an architectural form objectify experience, and then reify it in architecture.

If an advantage of the tour narratives at Fallingwater is their dynamic, emergent quality, one of the disadvantages of Fallingwater's present physical incarnation is its frozen stage set. Sometimes cracks form in the narrative this facade tells. Memory conflicts with what is sensually encountered. Sometime the disjunction is seemingly insignificant: Roy Hall and Ed Danko remember more fur throws in the house; Elsie Fike thinks it looks basically the same but isn't "all set up" like it used to be.

But because local people often experience Fallingwater both as tourists and as actors in its previous incarnation as residence, the disjunction between memory and tableau can jar. Dorothy Barron provided our opening account of Fallingwater as experienced on an illicit tour in 1937, noting its resemblance to a movie set. I close with her impressions of her return as a paying visitor:

Barron: Now I would say when they turned it over to the state [sic] a lot of that stuff was taken out. Anything, even those hassocks are gone. And those pillows are gone. Not at all like those ones they have there now, they have them colored in these ugly drab looking colors, don't do anything for the room.

Gregory: So it looks different from how you remember it?

Barron: Oh, yes, it was, just, stunned you when you walked in and saw those colors against that white.



Figure 16: Abandoned house, Scott County, Virginia. 1992
Photograph by the author



Figure 17: House built by Fallingwater contractor Walter Hall, Bakers Acres subdivision, Port Allegany, Pennsylvania. Circa 1940s. Like most homes in the subdivision, a peaked roof has been added. The carport has also been extended. Photographed in a thunderstorm. 1997.
Photograph by the author

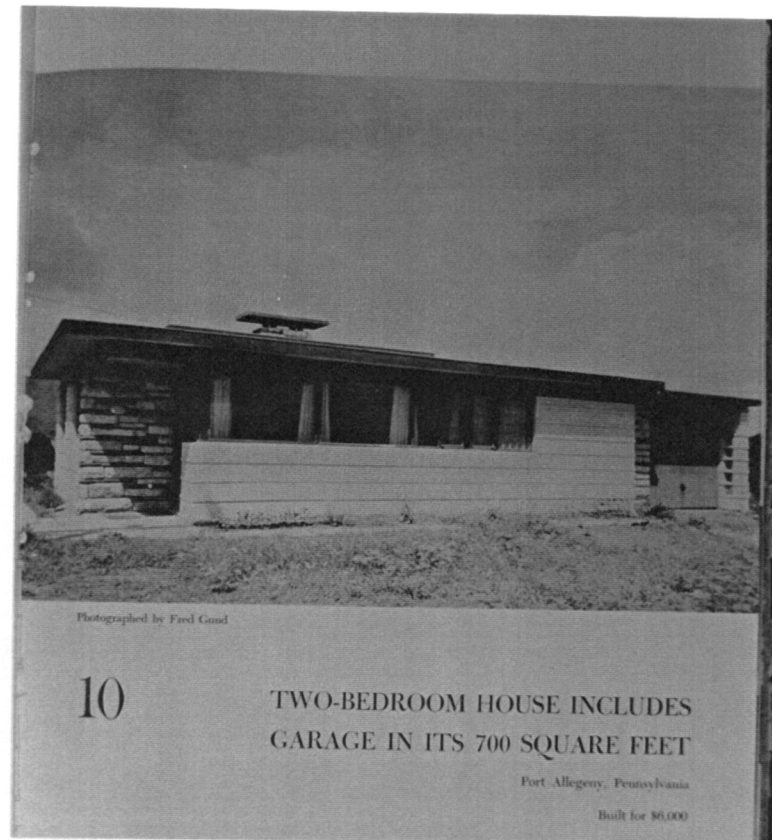


Figure 18: Bakers Acres home, as depicted in *America's Best Small Houses* (Hennessey 1949).

INTERCHAPTER

Buildings and Biographies

Places, like persons, have biographies inasmuch as they are formed, used and transformed in relation to practice. It can be argued that stories acquire part of their mythic value and historical relevance if they are rooted in the concrete details of locales in the landscape, acquiring material reference points that can be visited, seen and touched

—Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (1994:33)

In the fall of 1989, during the first months of my freshman year at a private liberal arts college, students thrown together from all over the map often traded tales of horror from the ‘burbs: my suburb is more oppressive, bland, generic, boring, or culturally impoverished than yours. Tales of driving aimlessly through labyrinthine streets of subdivisions, of mailbox baseball, of relatively harmless hijinks at the local mall were offered as reactions to what seemed an oppressive landscape.

Until that time, I assumed my own suburb was relatively typical of this thing called suburbia: a bedroom community for the once booming tire industry in neighboring Akron, Ohio, it featured a grid of numbered streets and rows of once identical “Cape Cod” houses that had acquired personalized touches in the decades since they were built to house the burgeoning work force of Goodyear, Goodrich, Firestone and the rest. They still made tires in Akron when I was growing up, and the mature silver maples and well-kept lawns of my suburb seemed a vast improvement over the cloud of sulfurous rubber fumes encountered on forays into Akron to visit my grandmother. But although my

suburb—Cuyahoga Falls—shared with the suburbs of my new friends a remotely picturesque name, I soon realized that their suburbs—Grosse Pointe, Bala-Cynwyd, Shaker Heights—represented vastly different social realities. Country clubs, advanced placement high school courses, and exotic varsity sports were a part of the worlds they described. And yet, we each thought our suburbia was THE suburbia. We assumed our suburban experience was a shared suburban experience: monolithic, unchanging, devoid of local difference.

During the summers of my college years, I worked for an emergency home repair program in central Appalachia, living in remote and impoverished communities and coordinating the efforts of volunteer church groups, often from suburbs very much like those of my college peers. Not entirely of the world of either place, I struggled to come to terms with both. Returning to the comfort and upper-middle class sensibilities of my college each fall, I wanted to find a way to use my academic experience to understand my summer experience. A political science major, I thought my chosen discipline offered a way. But while I found its broad theories helpful in understanding economic and social “forces” at work, I was perplexed at how to use its methods to understand the individual communities and people I had come to know. I wasn’t interested in tabulating local election returns and conducting surveys to determine levels of voter efficacy.

Turning my academic focus to literature, I immersed myself in Appalachia and its literature. I soon sensed, however, that “Appalachia,” like suburbia, was an idealized, even mythical place. Writers wrote of “their” Appalachias, and though I could discern broad patterns and surface similarities, like the political theory I had studied, it didn’t help me to understand local difference. Becoming interested in one community in which

I had worked, in Scott County, Virginia, I thought perhaps I could discover a more local level of literature, perhaps locally published poetry collections. The Carter Family, of early country music fame, was from Scott County, so perhaps their song lyrics would be of use.

Somehow, I stumbled onto the literature of folklore fieldwork methodology. Here was a method that allowed me to try to document and understand a place that I felt wasn't adequately represented in published form. I would produce my own texts—interviews and interview transcripts—and apply the methods of literary interpretation to them. Fortunately, I underestimated the amount of work involved in such a task: I never made it to the last step, overt literary analysis. I discovered, however, that the very task of collecting and compiling texts was an exercise in analysis and interpretation, and that even without imposing overarching theoretical frameworks, meaning could be discerned from the process.

Returning to Scott County in November to conduct “fieldwork,” I was struck by changes in the landscape. During the summers, I had been preoccupied with the inhabited houses—their rotting foundations, leaking roofs, and inadequate septic systems. Though intimately involved with these houses—inspecting ancient tin straddling questionable rafters, poking around rotten foundations in the muck and grime where chickens go to die—I had given little thought to their meaning. With the leaves off the trees in the autumn, however, abandoned homesteads predominated. Suddenly I had a focus for my vaguely defined fieldwork project. I would look for the stories behind these seemingly forgotten places. In the process, I developed a way of thinking about houses

and meaning, and a nascent methodology: that talking to people about houses could provide an approach to understanding these places.

In the summer of 1997 I arrived at Fallingwater to conduct an oral history project. My initiation to the house was two weeks of tour guide training, which proved to be a fortuitous introduction to the house and its life as a museum and a workplace. Although I had been long interested in places, I had relatively little exposure to the study of “high” architecture. Nonetheless, I managed to pull together a tour script that discussed the interplay and rhythms of lines and forms, the compression and release of space. I wrapped my mouth around the words of architectural interpretation, but somehow I wasn’t convinced (and judging from the occasional glazed look in their eyes, neither were some of the visitors on my tours).

Confronted with a site I did not understand, I retreated to a familiar, even retrograde methodology. I would conduct interviews, tape record them, transcribe them, and house them in an archive. I had no idea if my method would reveal anything interesting or even useful about Fallingwater. The ostensible time frame of my oral history project, the construction era of Fallingwater, was sixty years in the past, seemingly all but out of living memory. I busied myself with ordering recording equipment, drafting release forms, and compiling the names of potential interviewees. Immersing myself in the existing literature on the house was exasperating—there was so much of it, including a tome of two hundred oversize pages of beautiful photographs and elegant analysis by one of its former inhabitants, Edgar Kaufmann, jr., one time Curator of Architecture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Kaufmann 1986). If I had previously come to oral history as a default research method for structures for which there was no

other documentation, what would its role be *here*, a site all but smothered in text and exegesis?

Places have biographies. Lives are inscribed in the landscape through changes, adaptations, and modifications to the environment. Broad patterns may be revealed through an analysis of these landscapes. Such analyses are attractive because they are always grounded in the specificity of place. Folklore's strength is this specificity, and the power of its ethnographic method lies in its ability to shade, alter, or even subvert the comfortable fictions by which we organize our lives. Suburbia. Appalachia. Modernity. Tourism. Conservation. Preservation. All are broad conceptual frameworks, narratives that seek to explain particular aspects of human interaction with the larger world. They can also become their own discourses, however, as secretions of theory and history shade their meanings and remove them a step further from experience in the world. By poking around the borders of these overarching narratives, folklore can highlight local manifestations of widespread phenomena.

Maybe the final outcome of an ethnographic approach to Fallingwater, then, would be a subtler shading of some of the broad conceptual categories that constantly swirl around it, the proclamations made about its meaning and significance. Maybe by focusing on the lives of some of the people in its history, by examining the biographies they leave behind in their own buildings, the hours I spent listening and re-listening to stories and bits of topographical lore could contextualize and ground this place that is so difficult to understand.

The flat-roofed houses of the Baker's Acres subdivision, built by Fallingwater contractor Walter Hall as one of his last projects in a long career, offer a hint of the

intersection of buildings and biography (figures 17 and 18). They are unlike any homes previously built in Port Allegany, Pennsylvania, but they did not come from nowhere. They were the result of one man wrestling with the nebulous concept of modernity, and attempting to provide a solution in concrete and glass.

Fallingwater is also a work of modern architecture. To this day, even with cracks in its stucco and the patina of sixty years of intensive use, it can still strike viewers as shockingly modern. It is held up as representative of Frank Lloyd Wright's modern approach: a break with tradition, but grounded in the logic of organic asymmetry and freedom of form found in nature (Hoffman 1986:41). Wright is held up not as a drone to the dogma of modern architecture—the intentionally bland, flat-roofed boxes of the International style—but as a genius, even a renegade, in subverting the prevailing forces of style. Architectural historian Neil Levine interprets Fallingwater as Wright's personal challenge of the International style and its “misplaced machine worship,” a triumph of Romantic expressionism and pragmatic individualism (Levine 1996:220).

The characterization of Fallingwater as an intensely personal triumph for Wright only furthers the fiction of much of architectural history: that individual geniuses “advance” design through inspired personal innovation. A whole movement—Modernism—is defined by the works and pronouncements of a handful of famous architects—van der Rohe, Gropius, Le Corbusier and even that wily Romantic modernist, Wright. And yet a look at the landscape reveals that even in a place as far off the beaten path as Port Allegany in the 1930s, signature elements that became the hallmark of Wright's inspired Romantic modernism were part of the repertoire of a local builder trained in the regional vernacular building tradition.

Before he was hired to oversee construction of Fallingwater, Walter Hall was an established and respected contractor in Port Allegany, his hometown. He built just about everything—churches, schools, private residences—but his specialty was stone masonry. Beginning in the early 1930s, on evenings and weekends Walter Hall devoted himself to what he considered to be his personal masterpiece: Lyn Hall (figure 9). Built not on commission but as a tribute to his wife, Lyn Hall was also Walter Hall's on-going experiment in masonry technique and building technology (Ray Hall 1997, Hoffman 1993:31).

In 1997, Lyn Hall is a forlorn presence along the main highway on the outskirts of town. Locked up during a fifteen-year legal skirmish over its ownership, it is in serious disrepair. The roof leaks. Overgrown pine trees obscure the facade. There have been several small fires. The built-in furniture rots perceptibly. Still, as Walter Hall's grandson, Ray Hall, leads me through the house he points out some of the features that it shares with Fallingwater: cantilevered construction method, an asymmetrical masonry core, irregular horizontal masonry, a prominent, unusual hearth, recessed lighting, bands of windows. A small waterfall even runs through the center of the house. Constructed several years before Fallingwater but always a work in progress, its masonry reportedly won Hall the Fallingwater contract.

But Lyn Hall is not the only testament to Hall's experimentation on the Port Allegany landscape. Rudy Anderson, Hall's former apprentice and later a respected contractor himself, takes me on a driving tour through the town. Our first stop: a relatively conventional late Victorian cottage, one of Hall's first houses, built in the first decades of the twentieth century. Our next stop: a 1920s bungalow with a broad, almost

flat roof. The final stop: Bakers Acres, a subdivision Hall designed, built and promoted in the 1940s. A group of small one-story masonry houses, once flat-roofed but now nearly all with peaked roof additions, the cluster of houses occupies a hilltop just outside the center of town. Rudy Anderson explains the houses as we drive by:

See, he always had a fireplace in every house he built. The fireplace was one of the essential things. Stonework was important. The low roofline.

In the development that he built, they were all flat-roofed houses, but you know the flat roofs, they didn't hold up good. You know after a few years they would leak. Most of the houses have been replaced with pitched roofs on them (Gregory: oh, okay). Uh, and he also had radiant heat, concrete, stone floor with radiant heat in it. In all of his houses up here he had it. Now this one right here, right on the corner was a flat-roofed house, that over the years was changed. And that second house. The second house was built with a pitched roof, but that was a bit later. [...]

This is the only one left that has a flat roof on it. This is what they were all like. That's Walter Hall's specialty (Anderson 1997).

The evolution of Hall's house designs parallel broader themes in the emergence of modern architecture in America. Like Wright, early in the 20th century Hall built romantic, horizontal bungalows that hugged the land. A decline in paying commissions in the 1930s enabled each to produce unconventional masterworks with the help of available, inexpensive hand labor. Both met the post-war need for affordable housing with innovative plans inspired by technological innovations: the flat roofs, masonry walls, radiant heat, and prominent hearths of Hall's Baker's Acres subdivision closely match the features of Wright's Usonian scheme for mass housing (Sergeant:1976).

Even before Fallingwater, Walter Hall was aware of Frank Lloyd Wright and greatly admired his work (Ray Hall 1997, Anderson 1997). He read with interest Wright's theoretical writings on architectural principles, but there is no indication that he

was directly influenced by Wright's specific designs: Lyn Hall pre-dates Fallingwater's conception and construction, and Bakers Acres emerged at the same time Wright was articulating and developing his Usonian concept. Rather than direct emulation, he saw in Wright a kindred spirit for his own will to experiment with form and technology, and reacted to the same cultural forces that influenced Wright's designs and innovations.

My point here, however, is not a detailed study of influence and originality. Because of its remote location, visitors to Fallingwater often remark that it is a work of art "plopped down in the middle of nowhere." Throughout this work, I have attempted to show that the area around Bear Run is not "nowhere" or even an idealized "natural landscape" but a place of deep and sometimes conflicting human memory and experience. By this brief example from Walter Hall's biography in buildings, my intent is to show that the "art" of Fallingwater, no matter how original and despite the obvious degree of skill with which it is conceived and executed, does not come from nowhere. The same ideas that Wright experimented with and eventually became famous for and closely associated with, were experimented with by vernacular builders and designers across the country. Because our architectural history is so closely yoked to the biographies of a famous few, broad ideas like Wright's organic architecture come to be seen as the province of a sole originator. Wright may have taken these ideas to unmatched heights, but he did not pursue them or develop them in a vacuum. He may have articulated them with unusual clarity and vigor, but he was not the only one to ponder them, or to leave behind a biography in concrete and glass.

My suggestion here is that in the lives of Fallingwater's builders and the houses they left behind, we can see localized manifestations of larger cultural patterns. Modern

architecture is just one manifestation of a larger cultural force, Modernism, and its accompanying currents—Industrialization, Urbanization, Automation, the Rise of the Corporation. It is significant that every former Fallingwater construction worker I interviewed—Gene Work, Earl Friend, Glenn Work, Albert Ohler, Wendell Burnsworth, Rudy Anderson, Jim Eicher, Walter Detling, Merle Taylor—went on to work for some amount of time in residential, industrial, or highway construction. The same forces that pulled young men away from the farms and small towns of Southwestern Pennsylvania and into the burgeoning Pittsburgh industrial landscape were at work across the country. As previously noted, despite its technical sophistication and the feats of engineering that made it possible, the bulk of the work on the Fallingwater construction site was hand labor: shoveling cement ingredients, quarrying stone, filling concrete forms hundreds of feet over a waterfall one wheelbarrow-ful at a time. As teenage laborers toiling at a remote site deep in the woods, could they have any idea how important—and ubiquitous—the engineered steel and reinforced concrete they worked with on a daily basis would eventually become?

I began this chapter with a reflection on my own interaction with the landscape, a landscape in some ways shaped by the modernist forces discussed here. The houses of Bakers Acres, once full of the promise of modern technology to fill practical needs—though still appreciated by some as relics of a hopeful past—are mostly seen as too small, too leaky, and too ugly to be the revolutionary approach to building they were hoped to herald. Likewise the rational grid of my childhood suburb, now fading and outclassed by

newer, farther out suburbs deep in the former countryside. In lives and in the landscape, in buildings and biographies, the anonymous forces of culture play themselves out.

CONCLUSION: Stalking Modernity

. . . there's a MONSTER at the end of this book . . .

In a Sesame Street children's book, Grover, the lovable blue fuzzy Muppet, implores the reader NOT to turn the page, for it will only bring the reader (and Grover) that much closer to the feared monster at the end of the book. Increasingly desperate, Grover builds elaborate constructions to prevent the inevitable confrontation. Finally, with much trepidation, the final page is turned, and what do you know, the monster that has been the subject of speculative doom is none other than Grover himself—lovable, furry old Grover.

In a sense, Modernity has been the monster lurking at the end of this thesis. I didn't choose to stalk this particular monster, but once I became aware of it, I saw its presence everywhere. Modernity is particularly elusive and slippery in that way. Although in casual usage it has the benign connotation of the current and contemporary, in its more sinister incarnation it exists as a philosophical discourse, an ongoing dialectic between Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Habermas, Foucault, and their seemingly endless interpreters and extrapolators (Habermas 1990).

Since my subjects for inquiry were folklore and Fallingwater, an eventual confrontation was perhaps inevitable. Folklore, a discipline "created as a silent Other of modernism" (Briggs and Shuman 1993:109) and Fallingwater, the creation of Frank Lloyd Wright and "the all-time best work of modern architecture," are governed by

conflicting narratives. Modernity, of which modern architecture is but one manifestation, can be characterized as a quest to make order of a chaotic world by seeking truth through scientific rationality. Described by sociologist Peter Berger, it manifests itself in underlying institutional processes: a capitalist market economy, a bureaucratized state, the mass communications media, and forms of consciousness based on scientific rationality (Berger 1977, in Entrikin 1989.) Folklore, in contrast, can be seen as favoring contextuality, diversity, meaning, experience, the everyday, culture, and human agency (Ley 1989:60). While modernity makes claims to universality, folklore champions the particular.

And yet through folklore's methods and assumptions, I have been able to approach Fallingwater, a site I would otherwise not know how to get into. By viewing Fallingwater as a *local* manifestation of a global condition, Modernity, it could be cut down to size. Instead of modernity as totalizing dogma, I could view it as one of several competing narratives. I tried to highlight voices at the margins, places where the Wrightian / Conservancy / modernist narrative of space as Nature conflicted with local conceptions of space as meaningful and encultured place. Although I'm not sure my approach succeeded in rendering modernity completely familiar, lovable, blue, and fuzzy, it wasn't the foreboding monster of the imagination, either.

If ethnographic method allowed me to approach a formidable construct in a humane way, it also complicated previously familiar and friendly concepts. I like Fallingwater, nature preserves, and bicycle trails. And yet the ideologies that underlie these places, when thrown into relief by the aural evidence gathered, reveal that these fuzzy Grovers on occasion reveal a potentially more monstrous side.

Tourism has been characterized as a particular manifestation of modernity (Urry:1990, MacCannell 1976). By focussing on contrasting tourist landscapes, I have tried to show how different places attract different uses over time and can be seen as the embodiments of particular worldviews. Sylvia Rodriguez has written that the tourist's gaze objectifies topography into landscape or scenery, a process that often results in gentrification (Rodriguez 1994). Fallingwater and the surrounding Bear Run Nature Reservation may be seen as nothing less than a gentrification of Nature. Frank Lloyd Wright gazes at the site, has it mapped, and produces an improvement to the rocks and waterfall with modernist confidence that abstract form can represent universal ideals. Local reactions to Fallingwater—and the extent to which it must be presented and interpreted for visitors to “get it”—indicate that Wright's conception of Nature was not indeed universal but the product of a particular way of seeing.³⁸

The birth of Modernity is frequently attributed to Nietzsche's assertion that “God is dead.” The early modernists sought solace in spare space, stripped of historical reference and signifying nothing beyond itself. The effect of the modernist worldview on architecture—“the suppression of local context and culture, and the imposition of uniformity as a means to universality” (Ley 1989:60)—had a profound impact on the built environment. As noted, Frank Lloyd Wright is certainly not a paragon of “pure” modern architecture. He was a romantic, the organic nature of his architecture referencing forms found in the surrounding landscape. His attempt, then, might be seen as an attempt to contextualize stark modernism by referring to nature.

My approach may be seen as an attempt to contextualize Wright's contextualization. For Wright, Nature was an integrating myth. In this account, the myth

has been encultured human landscape. By seeking out narratives to give life to inanimate places, my account too may be seen as the manifestation of a particular view, an uncritical acceptance of “local knowledge” as a site of meaning.³⁹

Twenty-five years ago D. K. Wilgus declared “the text is the thing” as a reaction to increasing calls for a contextual, performative approach to folklore studies (Wilgus 1973). Wherever one falls in this debate, I think paying careful attention to the stuff of folklore—texts, if you insist—can be a strength. Drawing analysis from the material, not imposing theory from the top, can offer a grounded scholarship that leads the investigator to previously dark corners. Of course, I, like everyone, have my pet theories. But I tried to listen first. However broadly or narrowly one defines one’s texts, the things of folklore can be used to understand broader context. The creation of texts—recordings, photographs—and the “reading” of existing texts—narratives, landscapes—can be an approach to understanding “context.” Gathering, compiling, and ordering these texts is an act of both ideology and interpretation. We can use our methods to gain entry—illicit or otherwise—to places that might otherwise seem off limits.

NOTES

All oral history quotations in this article are from tape-recorded interviews conducted by the author in the summer of 1997 as an oral history intern at Fallingwater. In sections where I cite numerous quotations from the same individual, I note the first citation with parenthetical documentation. To avoid excessive parenthetical documentation, subsequent citations from the same interview source are not cited with parentheses.

Tapes and transcripts of the interviews are kept in the Fallingwater archive, Mill Run, Pennsylvania as part of its historical collection. The author acknowledges Fallingwater and especially the participants in the oral history project for permission to use these materials.

Some notes on transcription notation:

An em dash (—) indicates the joining of clauses. In verbal communication, narrators often start a phrase and then backtrack, trying a new approach. In aural form this is a perfectly clear way of communicating, but in transcribed form, it can be unclear.

The em dash is also used at the end or beginning of a line to indicate overlapping speech between the narrator and the interviewer.

An ellipse (. . .) indicates a pause in narration.

A bracketed ellipse [. . .] indicates that material (or, in some cases, an entire section) has been edited out. I make this distinction to retain the ellipse as a useful form of punctuation.

Notations in square brackets [] are meant to clarify passages that are clear in the aural account, but that may be unclear in transcribed form. The bracketed words are the author's.

I also would like to acknowledge the Western Kentucky University Office of Graduate Studies and Research for supporting this project with a graduate student research grant.

¹ Some influential studies examining folk architectural forms using ethnographic methods include Williams (1991), Pocius (1991), Martin (1984) and McDaniel (1982). In a review of the vernacular architecture and standard architectural history scholarship, I found few works that examined a work of “high” architecture using oral history or ethnographic methods. Annmarie Adams's (1995) article examines architect-designed suburban homes built by California developer Joseph Eichler as they were used versus

how they were designed and prescribed to be used. Adams's article is an important step in breaking the hegemony in the analysis of high architecture that privileges the architect's intent over the user's experience.

² Recent theoretical examinations of "context" by folklorists include Hufford (1995) and Ben-Amos (1994).

³ The internship took place at Fallingwater in the summer of 1997, fulfilling a course requirement for Western Kentucky University's Folk Studies Program. The internship was coordinated by the Allegheny Heritage Preservation Commission's summer internship program and supervised by Fallingwater's Curator of Education, Sarah Beyer. See appendix for a thorough description of the oral history project.

⁴ The well-respected *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* series, published biannually by the University of Tennessee Press, frequently includes examples of the best current work being done in the field.

⁵ See George Marcus's edited collection for a lively discussion of current attempts within anthropology to wrest itself from a past of "fine-grained, merely descriptive stud[ies] of primitive, exotic peoples" (1992:i)

⁶ Phenomenology, as described by Michael Jackson (1986) is the scientific study of experience: "it is an attempt to describe human consciousness in its lived immediacy . . ." (2). Though phenomenology has its roots in philosophy, Jackson makes a case for a phenomenological approach to anthropology, though he does so with that discipline's traditional concern for non-western cultures. Timothy Cochrane (1982, 1987), in contrast, describes phenomenology's impact on humanistic cultural geography, whose subject matter is more typically contemporary landscapes of the industrial West (1987:5). Edward Relph, David Lowenthal, and Yi-Fu Tuan were among the scholars who pioneered a "sense of place" scholarship within geography, centering on environmental perception.

⁷ See, in particular, Waggoner (1996), Hoffman (1993), Kaufmann (1986), Hildebrand (1991).

⁸ Near poets should not be construed to mean 'mere' poets: Clifford (1986b:20) mounts a defense for the potential truthfulness of poetry.

⁹ Statistics and information about Fallingwater as a tourist site, unless otherwise noted, are from Fallingwater staff training materials and internal publications, to which I was generously given access to by the Fallingwater staff. Information from published sources is cited by parenthetical documentation

¹⁰ Cultural geographer Fred Kniffen originated the term I-house. Henry Glassie, in *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (1975), interprets the I-houses of middle Virginia as indicators of a "fundamental shift" in the mind of 18th century home builders, a

deliberate attempt to impose order on the chaos of the surrounding world. What Glassie would make of Fallingwater's unordered facade and lack of formal and defined entry, one can only speculate.

¹¹ Edgar Kaufmann, jr. always spelled his name with a lowercase 'jr.'

¹² Mrs. Kaufmann's death was reported in the September 8, 1952 *Pittsburgh Post* in the following manner: "She was stricken suddenly Saturday night at Fallingwater, her summer home in Bear Run, Pa., and rushed to the hospital here by her husband, Edgar J. Kaufmann. Her death was at 6:55 a.m. The cause was not disclosed." [It was later confirmed that the death was suicide.]

¹³ Although Pennsylvania has been a locus for vernacular architecture research—particularly its Pennsylvania-German and barn architecture (see, for example Glass [1986]), southwestern Pennsylvania remains largely unexplored. In recent years significant heritage development initiatives have sparked interest in the region's industrial landscape. See, for example, Mulrooney (1991).

¹⁴ John Dorst's *The Written Suburb* (1989) provides the theoretical framework for my characterization of postmodern ethnography. This particular account, however, does not fully explore Fallingwater as a distinctly postmodern phenomenon.

¹⁵ The metaphor of the palimpsest became popular in postmodern literary criticism as a way to "problematize" any attempt to uncover the ultimate "meaning" of a text. Text-as-palimpsest allows for a polyvocal interpretation of texts, each interpreter "peeling back" layers of meaning in the never-ending task of deconstructing a text. Representative applications of the palimpsest metaphor by literary critics include Docherty (1986) and Golden (1992).

¹⁶ Max Putzel, "A House That Straddles a Waterfall," *St. Louis Post Dispatch* Sunday Magazine, March 27, 1937.

¹⁷ *Time* magazine, January 17, 1938.

¹⁸ Peg Orndorff remembers that her uncles John and Dave Collins, in addition to building the Ohiopyle schoolhouse, also worked briefly on the Fallingwater job (Orndorff 1997). See Koegler (1988) for a more general discussion on stone building traditions in southwestern Pennsylvania.

¹⁹ Interview with Ray Hall Jr., Walter Hall's grandson (1997). Ray Hall recently acquired Lyn Hall after a lengthy lawsuit. Lying in near ruin, Lyn Hall is an intriguing object of study itself. The large upstairs room, once the studio of Ray Hall Sr., a noted Port Allegany architect, contains papers, drawing and models documenting both Walter Hall's and Ray Hall's careers.

²⁰ Donald Hoffman's history of the building of Fallingwater has a slightly different version of the story (Hoffman 1993:31). Based on the oral history evidence, the hiring of Walter Hall has developed into a local legend cycle. That Hall was a "local" builder (though from 150 miles away), seems to have contributed to his popularity with workers, especially after problems with previous "arrogant" Wright apprentices. Future work will more closely document Hall's career and his influence on Fallingwater's aesthetic.

²¹ Hoffman quotes Wright's apprentice Bob Mosher, who was one of several Wright apprentices who oversaw construction before the arrival of Hall. Mosher discusses his difficulty in attaining the proper aesthetic for the stonework in the early phases of construction:

The stone has been thin and warpish, there are places I am not satisfied with, and I taxed the stonelayers' patience to a high degree in making them replace, re-cut, and choose their stones. They are trained now but some have quit because of their lack of patience (Hoffman 1993:29).

There are accounts in the oral history interviews of well-known local stone masons who left the site in disgust as well.

²² "Sedimented human landscape" is Tilley's term (1994), an apt description of the view of landscape that I uncovered from deep listening.

²³ Clifford (1986) thoughtfully explores the concept of the ethnographic allegory.

²⁴ Leo Marx quotes Erwin Panofsky's description of iconographical analysis:

When we try to understand . . . [a work] as a document of . . . [a] civilization . . . we deal with the work of art as a symptom of something else which expresses itself in a countless variety of other symptoms, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as more particularized evidence of this "something else." The discovery and interpretation of these symbolical "values" (which are often unknown to the artist himself and may even emphatically differ from what he is consciously intended to express) is the object of what we may call "iconology" as opposed to "iconography" (In Marx 1988:183).

²⁵ Palmer's *Youghiogheny: Appalachian River* (1984) describes the appeal of whitewater with the fervor of a convert: "Whitewater. There is something about it. I suspect that the looks are part of the appeal . . . Recent studies of ions—positive and negative charges of electricity in the air—have found that negative ions make people feel good . . . What does all of this have to do with the Youghiogheny? The rapids of the river seethe with negative ions. . . . Whitewater becomes more than fun. It becomes a passion in the body as well as the mind. This verges on the spiritual and verges on the scientific; river magic and negative ions." (191).

²⁶Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discussed the “theming” of local experiences in tourist settings in a panel, “Oral and Material Culture” at the 1998 meeting of the American Folklore Society in Austin. She describes theming as a part of the “world-making” function of tourism, where tourist sites seek to replicate the “experience” of other places. The ticketed “New York Experience” attraction in Las Vegas, for example.

²⁷Tim Palmer offers a detailed history of the emergence of the rafting “industry” on the Youghiogheny (1984:203-234). Recent years have seen the professionalization and to some extent consolidation of the rafting companies, but for the most part they remain local (though some have actually expanded to operate similar ventures in the New River Gorge region of West Virginia and other whitewater locations).

²⁸From an Allegheny Heritage Development Corporation report, “A Summary of Economic Benefits Derived from Tourism to a Nine-County Region in Pennsylvania” (1992).

²⁹Hoffman provides an excellent historical contextualization of Fallingwater’s site, an unusual, though welcome, inclusion for an architectural historian.

³⁰The club featured a two-story frame clubhouse that served as a dormitory. This clubhouse is the hotel Felton refers to.

³¹There is an increasing recognition of the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of ritual. In addition to getting scholars from all the disciplines that deal with the subject to engage in a dialog, there is a recognized need to encourage more precise usage of “ritual” and its associated terminology. In 1997, the Department of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University (Ohio) initiated an annual conference on ritual, festival, holiday, celebration, and public display, in part to meet these needs. Catherine Bell’s work (1992, 1997), though growing from religious studies, is an important attempt to engage the various disciplines addressing ritual in a more precise approach to the topic.

³²The interior of the servant’s quarters, now administrative offices, are toured only on the early morning in-depth tour. On the in-depth tour, which costs more than twice the admission charge of the regular tour, the only other additional areas the visitor gets to see are the house’s other utilitarian spaces: the kitchen and cellar of the main house. An interesting illustration of MacCannell’s observation that tourists place a premium on gaining entry to “back spaces” (1976: 94).

³³Fallingwater is in a very rural pocket of Fayette County. Unlike other historic houses, it does not have a large pool of volunteer labor nearby, one reason for the rather unusual reliance on professional interpretive staff. “Local” staff are rather condescendingly described in the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy’s 50th anniversary publication: “While the locally-hired tour guides were cordial and diligent, complicated architectural and historical information often became garbled” (Netting 1982:18). In my experience, the tour guides—many of them with long history of service—were invariably well-informed, articulate, and imaginative in their presentation of their house. In addition,

their daily, intimate interaction with the house makes them some of its most apt analysts: they *know* this place.

³⁴ *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1966

³⁵ Both Durkheim's and Turner's classifications of ritual emphasize the ordering of human experience into categories, a persistent impulse in anthropology that reached its apogee with structural anthropology in the 1960s in its emphasis on binary oppositions. Durkheim's classification is from *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995 [1915]) pp. 339-40, Turner's from *Forest of Symbols* (1967), p. 6.

³⁶ See for example Selwyn (1996), Urry (1994), Moranis (1992), Graburn (1989), Sears (1989).

³⁷ Guidebooks listing various Wright homes open to the public—and even some attempting to list all Wright sites in existence—are an indication of the Frank Lloyd Wright pilgrimage phenomenon. See, for example, Sanderson (1995).

³⁸ David Ley's article, "Modernism, Post-Modernism and the Struggle for Place," is a cogent distillation of the modernist impulse and its effect on the built environment. He describes how its underlying rationality had to be imposed on local communities:

But the rational attitude had to be cultivated, it required professional translators to make the new order transparent to a mass public; in the arts this was the self-appointed mandate of the avant-garde, in the city it was the task of a new group of social engineers, including the planner, the social worker, the traffic engineer, and city manager, to inculcate the spirit of rationality and professional disinterest (1989:51).

³⁹ See Shuman (1993) for a critique of folklorists' uncritical approach to "local culture." For a more generalized discussion of local knowledge within cultural anthropology, see Geertz (1983).

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APPENDIX

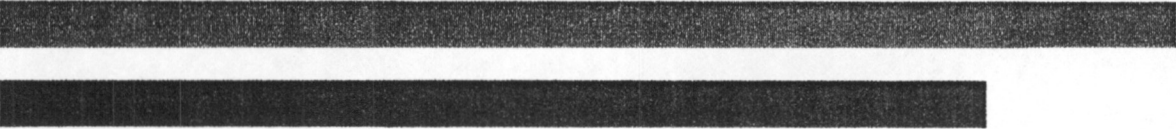
A National, Landmark a Local Story: Fallingwater Oral History Project

A final project report submitted to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and the Allegheny Heritage Development Commission, August 15, 1997

A National Landmark,

A Local Story . . .

Fallingwater Oral History Project



Final Project Report
1997 AHDC Internship Program
Submitted by Brian Gregory
August 15, 1997

A landscape by itself can provide only clues to the story of a place: crumbling foundations, overgrown roadbeds, quarry scars. Human memory fleshes the story out. By talking to the builders and maintainers of a sacred space, much can be learned about what a place means to those who most intimately use and know it . . .

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT:

- To inform the Allegheny Heritage Development Commission of my activities at Fallingwater
- To create a resource that may be used by other AHDC interns undertaking oral history projects
- To guide Fallingwater employees who will continue this project
- To compile in one place information related to the oral history project

Submitted by
Brian Gregory
Graduate Program in
Folk Studies
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, KY

1997 Internship in Oral History at Fallingwater

A Final Project Report Submitted to the Allegheny Heritage Development Corporation and the Faculty of the Graduate Program in Folk Studies, Western Kentucky University

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Executive Summary

Project Sponsor:

Fallingwater, P.O. Box R, Mill Run, PA 15464, (412) 329-1441

Project Supervisor:

Sarah E. Beyer, Curator of Education

Intern:

Brian Gregory, 1529 7th Street, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio 44221 (330) 923-4010

Project Description

The Fallingwater Oral History Project is an attempt to comprehensively document the role of local residents in the construction of Fallingwater and in life at Fallingwater during the Edgar J. Kaufmann family's residence, 1936-1963. The project seeks to identify living area residents who have some connection to Fallingwater, to conduct oral history interviews with and photograph as many of these individuals as possible, and to create an oral history archive to preserve local knowledge about the former Kaufmann family summer residence and estate. In addition, the project will train staff members to conduct oral history interviews to add to the archive, as well as seek to disseminate information gained in the process to Fallingwater staff and the general public.

Project Accomplishments

A master list of potential informants was compiled. Approximately thirty formal interviews were recorded, indexed, and organized into an oral history archive. A process was put in place for the gathering of additional oral history information in the future. Outreach efforts were made to identify and acknowledge the role of local residents in the creation and maintenance of what is considered to be a masterpiece of modern architecture.

Project Objective

***To conduct a
comprehensive
oral history
documentation
project among local
residents to
document the
construction of
Fallingwater and
life at Fallingwater
during the
Edgar J. Kaufmann
family's residence,
1936-1963 . . .***

The project's overall goal was broadly defined. Rather than investigating a specific aspect of Fallingwater's history, I interpreted the intent as a broad survey of living resource people who might be able to flesh out particular areas of our knowledge of the house, the Kaufmann estate and the larger Bear Run community. Since each person's involvement was different, it was not possible to develop a master list of research questions. Rather, it was necessary to define particular areas of interest and then listen carefully to the narrators. How might their diverse experiences at Fallingwater – often for a limited duration many years ago – help illuminate the areas of interest?

The following research areas were identified:

- *The landscape.* Frank Lloyd Wright didn't design it. Who did? How was it maintained? What kinds of outbuildings and gardens were there? Gather information to supplement landscape management and interpretation plan by Andropogon Associates, landscape architecture consultants.
- *Construction of Fallingwater.* What was the worksite like? Who worked here? What was the balance between skilled and general laborers? What were some of the processes used?
- *The Kaufmann family.* We know they used the house as a weekend retreat, but what was life like here? What did guests do? What did the house look like? How were spaces used, both in the house and on the grounds. What kind of interaction was there between the Kaufmanns and the local community, between servants of the Kaufmanns and the local community?
- *Community Context.* Fallingwater was built during the Great Depression in rural, mountainous Fayette County. What was the impact of the Depression on the community, and how did families cope? What was the immediate community around the Kaufmann estate like, and how did Fallingwater fit in or stand out from it?

In addition to these research goals, the following specific job duties were identified, followed by a report on progress toward meeting these each goal:

Project Goal 1: *Develop a contact list of informants*

***See Oral History Project
Master Contact List, in the
appendix***

The first step was to develop a contact list of potential interview subjects. Some groundwork had been done by Fallingwater employees at previous Fayette County Days, an annual day when local residents get to tour the house for free. In addition, several current staff members are long-time residents of the area who knew of people to contact. The following auxiliary methods were employed:

- A mini-public relations campaign. The attached press release was sent out to area newspapers. All ran short announcements. Flyers were posted throughout the area at stores, post offices, and other gathering areas. Although few responded directly to these announcements, many people saw them and it provided some legitimacy to the project when I made blind calls to potential interviewees. In addition, I was a guest on a local hour-long local radio talk show late in the project.
A more aggressive PR campaign might have scared up additional interview subjects, especially if efforts had been extended into the Pittsburgh market. However, since the focus of the project was to be on local residents, the time and effort such an effort would have required would have outweighed its usefulness.
- Referrals from other interviewees. I made it a point to always ask if interviewees knew of other folks I should talk to. Although the same names usually popped up, this method proved important on several occasions.
- Research in Fallingwater archives and other local history sources. Familiarizing myself with names and important local events enabled me to perk my ears up when a name came up in a conversation who might be someone to talk to.

Despite these efforts, there are still people out there who we did not get to. One of the problems with a site like Fallingwater is that because it is so famous, people are reluctant to think that their involvement is significant. I tried to get the message out that we were not just interested in people who helped build the house, but I'm not sure how effective this was. In addition, there are some key people who were not willing to be interviewed because of negative feelings toward Fallingwater, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, and/or the Kaufmann family.

Announcements about the oral history project were sent to and printed in:

- *The Tribune-Review* (Greensburg)
- *The Herald-Standard* (Uniontown)
- *The Daily Courier* (Connellsville)
- *The Daily American* (Somerset)
- *Friends of Fallingwater* (newsletter)

Local AM radio stations were also willing to feature the project on their morning talk shows.

The following media sources are interested in publicizing results of the project:

- *The Tribune-Review*, Paul Heyworth, 626-0563
- WCVI, Connelsville, Jack McMullin, host, Talkline

Text of the press release:

RELEASE DATE: June 26, 1997

CONTACT: Brian Gregory
412/329-5754

FALLINGWATER LAUNCHES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

This summer Fallingwater begins a community oral history project to actively seek out and record the experiences of area residents who have some connection to the famous house on the waterfall at Bear Run. Sixty-two years have passed since construction began, making first-hand recollections of people who helped build the house or were present during the Kaufmann era an increasingly precious resource.

Brian Gregory, a summer intern at Fallingwater, will conduct oral history interviews with project participants. The interviews will become part of Fallingwater's archives and will help present and future staff members and researchers better understand the house and its relation to the community.

The oral history project is looking for individuals with a wide variety of Fallingwater experiences. Individuals are sought who helped build the house, who worked for the Kaufmann family, or who may have just visited on a special occasion. In addition, project organizers hope to talk with community members who have general knowledge of life around Bear Run from the 1930s through the 1950s.

Gregory's internship is sponsored by the Allegheny Heritage Development Corporation (AHDC), a non-profit organization that promotes heritage tourism in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

If you have Fallingwater memories and would be willing to be interviewed please contact Brian Gregory at (412) 329-5754, or send a note to Fallingwater, P.O. Box R, Mill Run, PA 15464. Fallingwater is entrusted to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, a private, non-profit conservation organization of 16,000 members.

Project Goal 2: *Gather appropriate materials and supplies*

Mail order sources for audio recording equipment and supplies:

B & H Photo * Video * Audio
119 W. 17th Street
New York, NY 10011
1-800-947-9970

J & R Music World
59-50 Queens-Midtown Expressway
Maspeth, NY 11378-9896
1-800-221-8180

The following equipment recommendations were made:

Tape Recorder

- Professional models begin around \$200. The model I recommend is a Marantz PMD-430, available through B & H for \$454.50. Marantz is the superior manufacturer of equipment for spoken-word recording. Features include: stereo, broadcast-quality recording; a VU meter which enables the interviewer to monitor recording levels; 2 mic inputs; and a carrying case/strap. Sony has professional models at a similar price, but they are calibrated more for music recording.
- Two external microphones are needed to record in stereo. I recommend purchasing a Shure SM57-LC model microphone with a cardioid recording pattern, available for \$80.00 from B&H. Fallingwater already has several Audio-Technica microphones which can be used as the secondary microphone.
- A non-stereo Marantz machine is available for approximately \$100 less, but in addition to lack of stereo, is made of lesser quality components.
- Digital recording equipment is becoming standard for broadcast work, but for archival purposes, analog cassette recording is standard.

Cassette Tapes

- For archival purposes and spoken-word recording, any name-brand cassette tape is acceptable. 90 minute tapes are ideal for ease of use during interviews.

Archival Storage Materials

- No special archival conditions are needed for the storage of audio-visual materials other than constant temperature and humidity, which are already present in the Fallingwater storage building.
- Tapes and any supporting documents should be stored together in one acid-free file for each interviewee. All oral history materials should be stored together as a collection.

The recommended equipment was purchased, and with the exception of the battery charger and batteries, is stored in the canvas equipment bag. Inventory of recording equipment purchased for the oral history project:

- Marantz PMD 430 stereo cassette recorder w/ strap and vinyl cover
- Shure SM 57 Dynamic microphone
- Audio-Technica ATM 27HE hypercardioid microphone
- 6' microphone cord
- 16' microphone cord
- AC adapter
- 1/6"-to-1/4" adapter for headphone jack
- cable to connect Marantz to speaker jack of a cassette recorder to allow dubbing of tapes

All warranties and instructions are stored in the equipment file in the oral history project box.

Basic Instructions for Using the Marantz Tape Recorder for Oral History Interviews

The Marantz is a sturdy and versatile machine. A number of its functions are not necessary for basic oral history interviewing; the instruction book has a good diagram and description of the machine's features. The following are my operating recommendations;

Stereo Recording

In order to use the machine's stereo capabilities, two microphones are needed.. The stereo/mono switch on the right side of the machine must be flipped to stereo. You will know you are recording in stereo when both VU meters are active.

For recording quality, it is always preferable to record in stereo. Occasionally, if the interviewee seems a bit nervous, I use one microphone in order to be less obtrusive. Mono recording is also preferable for mobile interviews. When recording in mono, use the "left" microphone jack.

Microphone Placement

Both microphones are very sensitive and can pick up sound from far away, but as a general rule, the closer the microphone can be placed to the speaker's mouth, the richer the tone. So the goal is to get the microphone as close as possible without being obtrusive. Both microphones have a cardioid, or heart-shaped, recording pattern, which means the area directly in front of the microphone head is the most sensitive and should be aimed at the sound source.

The placement of the microphones greatly impacts the quality of the recording. As always in oral history interviewing, there is a tension between producing a technically-superior sound recording and the human element of creating an environment conducive to the comfortable exchange of information. I prefer to err on the human side of the equation, placing the microphone not necessarily directly in front of the interviewee, but slightly off to the side, so it is not directly in front of the person talking.

For the same reason, I do not generally use a free-standing microphone stand. Instead, I find that placing the microphone unobtrusively on a table or other piece of furniture produces adequate recording quality without transforming the interview environment into a studio environment. It is important, however, to never place a microphone directly on a bare tabletop, as any movement will produce distracting noise. Placing the mic on a piece of foam, on the carrying bag, or whatever else is handy greatly reduces unwanted noise.

Why use two microphones? At first it may seem cumbersome and unnecessary. The interviewee is the reason for the interview, afterall, so why bother mic-ing the interviewer? Context. If just one microphone is used, the person not directly in front of the microphone sounds muffled. Using two microphones more accurately reproduces the environment of the interview. Both speakers are a part of it, and should be represented on the tape.

Recording Levels

The Marantz has two dials, called VU meters, which display the recording level for the left and right recording channels. Recording levels can be adjusted by turning the knob to the right of the dials. The VU meter should peak into the red part of the dial as the intensity of sound increases. A properly set recording level will peak into the red only occasionally, when the speaker raises his or her voice or moves closer to the microphone.

Again, it is best to err on the human side of the technical/human equation. To avoid the distraction of constantly looking at the VU meter to make sure it is adequately picking up sound, I purposely set the recording levels high (7 or 8) and let the machine do its work. An ordinary conversation does not produce sound levels that will cause distortion on the tape. Although the VU meter may peak into the red more often than is ideal, the interviewer has the reassurance that voices are being adequately recorded and can concentrate more on the dynamics and content of the interview.

Recording Problems

The Marantz proved to be a sturdy and reliable recording machine. I did, however, encounter the following problems:

- **Battery Power.** The nickel cadmium rechargeable batteries I used were unpredictable. Even though I was diligent about keeping them charged, they seemed to peter out at inopportune moments. If the battery power is low, the machine continues to record, but the tape produced is distorted. The only way to avoid this is to use the AC adapter (which limits mobility), or to occasionally check recording levels using headphones. Unfortunately, changing batteries is rather cumbersome and requires removing the machine's case and strap. "Safe" recording time for a set of rechargeable batteries: 45 minutes.
- **Background Noise.** Many interviews were conducted outdoors, which is a great setting but can produce noisy tapes. Chief culprits: wind, traffic, windchimes. Thoughtful microphone placement is one solution. Moving indoors isn't necessarily a fix: clocks, air conditioners, and noise from other rooms can be just as distracting.

With the recording levels set high, I have found the Marantz to be quite effective in recording even very soft voices. Often, the tape is clearer than the actual conversation. With the microphone placed reasonably close to the interviewee, I have never had to ask someone to speak up in order for the recorder to pick up their voice.

One disadvantage to the recording sensitivity of the Marantz is that background noises are sometimes recorded all too clearly. Although the recording of ambient sound is an important part of providing context to the interview, excessive background noise can be distracting. Traffic noise is especially troublesome. If recording outside or on a front porch – the most common location for summertime interviews – position the interviewee, if at all possible, *facing* traffic, so the microphone is aimed toward the house and not toward the road.

In order to properly use the VU meters while recording, select "source" rather than "tape" with the source/tape selection button. "Source" records the sound as it is coming into the machine, which is what the interviewer wants to monitor during a recording session. The "tape" setting should be used to check sound levels during playback once a tape is made.

Feedback

The Marantz has a built-in monitor speaker. If the monitor is left on during recording, feedback will result. Headphones may be used to monitor sound levels while recording.

Other Settings

The best way to familiarize yourself with the Marantz's other recording capabilities is to play with the machine, recording with different settings selected. The instruction book provides good explanations of various recording features.

Project Goal 3: Create appropriate documentation and interview forms

Forms Created (see appendix for examples):

1. *Potential Resource Person Form* -- An existing form, it is useful for collecting information from visitors coming through the house and recording basic contact information to be followed up later by an interviewer.
2. *Donor Form (Oral History)* -- This form was revised mid-project in order to provide a better explanation of the oral history project. It was based on release forms used for other oral history projects and on Fallingwater's existing donor form. Usually signed at the end of the interview, it gives permission for the oral history tape to be deposited in Fallingwater's archives for the use of Fallingwater staff and future researchers. No one objected to signing the form or raised questions about it. In retrospect, I should have had the interviewees sign two copies of the form and leave one with them since it explains the project and provides address and phone number for follow-up.
3. *Donor Form (Artifacts)* -- Fallingwater's existing form, taken with me to interviews in case someone wants to donate photographs or other items.
4. *Narrator/Fieldworker Data Form* -- Perhaps more thorough than necessary, it provides basic biographical information for each participant. Rarely did I fill in all the blanks. It did remind me, however, to ask about peoples' occupations and experiences after Fallingwater, which often provided useful and interesting information. perhaps at the Ohiopyle Community Center or some other community location. Also suggest to local media as potential feature stories.
5. *Index/Catalog Form*—The first part of the form contains contact and background information on the interviewee and a summary of the interview contents. The remainder is an index of topics covered in the interview with tape meter numbers.
6. *Oral History Project Master Contact List*—A computer database contains a list of all the people contacted for the oral history project as well as a summary of their area of knowledge, contact information, and notations for any follow-up needed.

Project Goal 4: Arrange for and conduct oral history interviews, primarily audio but perhaps some video

Text of a sample contact letter:

Dear Mr. Anderson,

For many years now, Fallingwater has been recognized around the world as a landmark of modern architecture. Despite all of the attention it has received, there is much that is still not known about the house and the people who helped build it. Fallingwater is attempting to remedy this situation by talking to as many people as can be found who worked on the house or have some first-hand knowledge of it.

I was talking to Dorothy Ohler the other day and she mentioned that you were one of the workers who came down from Port Allegheny to work on Fallingwater. Would you be willing to talk to me about that experience? I will be travelling up to that part of the state to do some other research, and I could schedule a time to talk with you then. Or, if it is more convenient for you, we could do a telephone interview. I will be in touch with you in a couple of days. In the meantime, thanks for any consideration you can give my request.

Sincerely,
Brian Gregory
Oral History Intern

Contacting Potential Interviewees

Some of the names on my initial contact list were related to current Fallingwater employees. Whenever possible, I attempted to “go through” someone rather than make a cold call. This wasn’t always possible or efficient, and in time I made more and more cold calls. Usually it was sufficient to just drop a name that the person knew. Only in one case did a person I made a cold call to decline to be interviewed (for reasons other than not having enough information to be interviewed).

I also experimented with sending letters, which seemed a little formal but generally got good results, except in one case, where I think the letter intimidated the person a little.

Overall, I found making cold calls to potential interviewees to be the most difficult part of the project. Once I got over the initial hurdles of explaining who I was, explaining what the project was about, and explaining what I wanted (an interview), people were generally receptive. The most common response was “I don’t think I know enough to be of help to you.” In most cases, this was false modesty, and I knew enough about the person to know that they did indeed have experiences that would be of use to the project. In other cases, the person’s involvement was peripheral and they indeed did not have useful information. It is difficult to make these judgement calls in the initial awkward phone conversation. I always threw out the idea of an interview, and unless the person outright declined, I went to talk with them. This made for some slightly awkward interviews, but more often than not was worth the effort.

One piece of advice: always attempt to set up an interview on the initial call. The longer people have to think about it, the more difficult it becomes to set up an interview, either because other things come up, or because their initial nervousness builds. If for whatever reason it seems the person will not be a good interview subject (poor memory, health problems, peripheral involvement), I tried to ask about old photographs the person may have or to at least get names of family members who worked on the house and were now deceased. Some of my best referrals came from people who declined to be interviewed themselves, but who gave me names of other people to talk to.

Negative feelings toward the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and/or Fallingwater were cited in only one case as a reason for declining to be interviewed. In several interviews

The following general list of questions was compiled during an initial brainstorming session. Although I did not generally ask questions directly from the list during interviews, it guided my thinking throughout the project.

I. The House

1. When did you first see Fallingwater?
2. What was your reaction? Others' reactions?
3. Did you see the site before the house was built? What was it like?
4. What is your opinion of Fallingwater?
5. Why do you think it is so famous? Why do people come?

II. Construction

1. How did you get hired?
2. How was it different from other construction jobs?
3. Did the foreman / supervisor give specific direction? What kind of supervision and feedback did you get?
4. Specific questions about individual processes: quarrying stone, laying stone, building forms, mixing concrete, pouring concrete.
5. Were there any unusual problems or delays?
6. What did you think about working on the house? Did you enjoy it?
7. What other kinds of work did you do then?
8. Describe a typical workday.
9. Did you see the Kaufmann family during construction? What were they like?
10. Did you learn new ways of doing things by working on Fallingwater? Did you ever use these skills elsewhere?

negative feelings did come up, but the interviewee was still willing to cooperate (perhaps because their participation was seen as benefiting the interviewer, a student, and not Fallingwater, the institution).

Conducting Interviews

We discussed conducting interviews on-site, in order to trigger memories and provide a perk to the participant. For the most part this didn't work out, due to a lack of quiet interview locations and the hassle of getting someone to the site, through the gate, and to a meeting place.

Whenever possible I conducted interviews in the interviewee's home. This was the most convenient and comfortable location for the person being interviewed, and gave me more control over the schedule – there is nothing worse than waiting around for someone to show up for an interview. I do see value in conducting follow-up interviews on-site, however, for the reasons mentioned above.

Before each interview, I sat down and wrote out a list of general questions to ask. Rarely did I ask questions directly from the list during the interview, but the process of writing questions out put them in my mind, in addition to providing a crutch to consult during awkward pauses in the conversation. There is some value in the discipline of asking from a prepared set of questions, however, because it forces you to cover areas you otherwise might self-censor from the conversation. For example, it might seem disrespectful to ask about nude swimming at Fallingwater, but if you are asking because it is on a prepared list of questions, it provides some cover. In general, however, I found it best to start people talking and then go with the flow.

Fallingwater as a Subject for Oral History

Fallingwater presented a number of challenges as the subject for an oral history project. My previous experience in conducting oral history interviews has been with topics which had

11. What did you think about the finished product?
Did you come back to see it?
12. Did you meet FLW? His apprentices?
13. Did you have any idea that the house would
be famous one day?

III. Life at Fallingwater

1. What was it like when the Kaufmanns were
there?
2. Did you ever see FLW? Apprentices ?
3. Did local people ever visit the Kaufmanns?
4. What did the Kaufmanns and their guests do
at Fallingwater?
5. How many people worked for the Kaufmanns?
Did they stay here?
6. What was the reaction of people in the
community (to Kaufmanns and staff?)
7. Do you remember any special occasions or
parties at Fallingwater?
8. Did people ever sneak onto the site?
9. Did you ever see the Kaufmanns around
town?
10. Were there other people like the Kaufmanns
who had vacation houses here? Where did
they live?

IV. The Site

1. What was the Kaufmann Summer Camp like?
The Masonic Camp?
2. How did people get here from the city?
3. Do you remember other buildings on the site?
What were they? Where were they?
4. Who was responsible for the landscape?
5. Who were some of his crew members? What
did they do?
6. What were the gardens like?

not previously received much attention. Even though we were attempting to investigate an aspect of Fallingwater's history that had not previously received attention – the role local people played in its construction and maintenance – interviewees often expressed the opinion that books and articles had previously covered the subject. And yet once given the opportunity to share their experiences, most participants seemed to enjoy the interest that was shown in their contributions.

Another difficulty in conducting an oral history project at Fallingwater is the number of years that have passed since its initial construction and occupancy. Sixty-two years have passed since construction began. Of the construction workers I talked to, most were very young men when they worked at Fallingwater. Other interviewees were recalling experiences from their childhoods, which were often vivid memories, but sometimes lacking in context.

Even though the project's scope took in life at Fallingwater into the 1960s, the perception lingered that we were most interested in the construction era. It was more difficult to get people to come forward to talk about life at Fallingwater for a variety of reasons: the estate was very private, former employees maintain a degree of loyalty to their employer and are reluctant to share details of life with the Kaufmanns, and there is a tendency to think that this aspect of Fallingwater's history is not important.

There were a number of very good interviews with people who grew up on the Kaufmann estate or whose families worked in Kaufmann's agricultural concerns. I stumbled on these people by chance, however, and it is difficult to get other people with similar experiences to come forward and realize that what they have to offer is significant.

Another difficulty associated with Fallingwater as a topic for oral history is the relative silence of many people in this region. For many people in this region, the past is not something to talk about. Strangers are not commonly regaled with colorful tales told on the front porch. Rather, an interviewer has to listen more carefully and seek the story in silences and sentences, the few words that are spoken taking on greater significance. Of course these are broad generalizations, but I think it is an important point to note for someone taking on an oral history project in this region.

7. Was there a lot of timbering / lumbering?
8. What kinds of fishing and hunting were done in the immediate area?
9. How have the roads changed?

V. Community / Cultural Context

1. How did people make a living when you were growing up?
2. What was the area like when you were young? How has it changed?
3. What was the effect of the Great Depression in the area?
4. How did people make it through the Depression?
5. When did things get better?
6. Did you go into "town" often? Which one? How did you get there?
7. Do you remember the post office? The train stop?
8. Where did you go to school? What was school like?
9. What kind of tourists came to the area? Where did they stay? For how long?
10. How did people react to visitors, both to Fallingwater and the area in general?
11. Did you go into "town" often? Which one? How did you get there?
12. What kind of tourists came to the area? Where did they stay? For how long?
13. When did people first start visiting the house? (Before it was official)
14. Did many people move away? Come back? Why did they move, why did they come back?
15. Describe the house in which you grew up.

I was continually impressed during interviews with the intimate knowledge people had of the lay of the land. Memories of buildings, roads, trails, and springs on the property seemed especially vivid. I experimented with using maps and photographs to assist in this process, with mixed results. Maps seemed too authoritative: people were willing to defer to what was printed on the page when it conflicted with their own memories. A clear attitude emerged toward the land, however. Fallingwater and the land that surround it were seen as a special place, details of its terrain viewed as important.

Video Documentation

Fallingwater has a number of videotaped oral history interviews, collected several years ago. These are valuable documents, but without supporting documents and contextual information (when and where the interview was recorded, who the person is and their involvement with Fallingwater) they are somewhat difficult to use as historical resources. At minimum, these tapes need to be indexed and the names of the interview subjects written down.

Although video equipment was available, no videotaped interviews were conducted in this phase of the oral history project. Video is a tricky medium, especially when interviewing individuals whose involvement with the subject is peripheral and who may be reluctant to talk to begin with.

Project Goal 5: Photograph informants

Individuals who donated photographs
and/or duplications:

Rudy Anderson
Port Allegany, PA

Jim Eicher
Port Allegany, PA

Charlotte Thomas
Chincoteague, VA

Glenn Work
Mill Run, PA

Project Goal 6: Survey existing photographic documentation

Photographing Informants

Photographing interview subjects proved surprisingly difficult. Lighting was an issue for interviews conducted in the evening and on rainy days, since I did not have equipment for indoor photography. On sunny days, people were often outside working in their yards and gardens and were reluctant to be photographed without “getting cleaned up.”

Perhaps I should have mentioned in the initial contact call that I would be taking photographs. There is so much ground to cover in this initial call, however, that I never thought to bring it up. Also, after inviting myself over to someone’s house and telling them that I will be tape recording them, mentioning that I also want to photograph them seems to be pushing it a bit.

A number of people told me to come back by on a Sunday afternoon to take their picture. Despite my intentions, this never worked into my weekend schedule.

A photojournalist I know told me to never ask permission to take a photograph: shoot now, ask questions later. The ends of oral history and photojournalism differ in this area, however. Ethically, I think an oral historian should always ask permission before breaking out the camera. It remains the interview subject’s right to decline to be photographed.

Project photographs are printed out as contact sheets. They are stored with the negatives in the oral history file.

Survey of Existing Photographic Documentation

Fallingwater’s photo archive contains few photographs from the construction era. Especially lacking are photographs of workers on the construction site. Several of the workers I interviewed have extensive photograph collections, mainly snapshots taken at the site. In addition, family members of deceased Fallingwater employees also often have photographs.

Several individuals were willing to have duplicates made of some of their photographs. A more systematic effort to solicit donations or duplication of photographs should be made. I indicated on the master contact list which individuals have photographs they might be willing to share. Marci Lynn McGuinness, a local historian in Ohiopyle, has an extensive collection of historic area photographs, some pertaining to Fallingwater.

Project Goal 7: *Index interviews*

Disclaimer on catalog forms:

This document is a catalog summary of an oral history interview. The catalog description that follows is a paraphrased summary of the interview contents. This document exists for the convenience of the researcher only: the cassette tape is the primary document and should always be referred to when making direct quotation from the summarized material. THIS IS NOT A TRANSCRIPTION.

An non-indexed oral history collection is of little value. Early in the project, an indexing format was developed which records background and contextual information for the interview. Sample first page of an index form (for an example of a complete index form, see appendix):

Fallingwater Oral History Project Interview Catalog

Tape number: OH-97-23

Name of interviewee: **Jim Bachman**
Address: **1234 Smith Street, Pittsburgh, PA**
Phone #: **(999)123-1234**

Date of birth: **May 27, 1921** Place of Birth: Age: **76**

Name of interviewer: **Brian Gregory**
Date of interview: **7/28/97** Place of interview: **caretaker's house at Fallingwater**
Other persons present at interview: **none**

Tape type: video ; audio X
Recorder model: **Marantz** Tape (brand and length): **TDK 90 minutes**
Amount used (side 1): **40 mins** ; (side 2):

Summary description of interview context and contents:

Jim Bachman's mother was a cousin to Liliane Kaufmann. The Bachmans frequently visited the Kaufmanns at Bear Run before and after the building of Fallingwater. Mr. Bachman was interested in agriculture, and Edgar Kaufmann sometimes had him help with farm duties. He remembers hauling stone from the quarry to the building site. The Bachmans bought a farm in Mill Run, which Mr. Bachman still owns.

The interview was conducted in the maintenance supervisor's office in the former caretaker's cottage at Fallingwater. Mr. Bachman had come to Fallingwater to look at archival photographs with his daughter and cousin, who were in the conference room looking at photographs during the interview.

Mr. Bachman has fond memories of Fallingwater and Bear Run, which he seemed happy to share. He made it clear, however, that he did not want to discuss Liliane's death or other controversial family issues. He was very obliging and said he would be happy to share any documents or other information that he has.

Oral History Index

An oral history index is a listing of topics covered in an interview and the meter numbers where they occur in the tape. The index lists only the topics covered and therefore does not supply specific information to the researcher.

The meter readings on different cassette players can vary significantly and should only be used as a rough guide to where information is on a particular tape.

Approximate time to index an oral history tape: 2 hours per hour of tape.

Oral History Catalog

An oral history catalog is an attempt to list all of the information contained on a particular tape. It is a thorough yet paraphrased written summary of a tape's content. The cataloger attempts to write down all information contained in the interview, but does not necessarily attempt to record the speaker's exact words.

A catalog is a compromise between an index and a full transcription. It is a tool to be used with the tape, but does not replace the tape as the primary documentation of the interview. A researcher must refer to the cassette tape when making direct quotations.

When cataloging, I have retained the use of the first-person form even though I am paraphrasing the speaker's words, mainly as a matter of convenience ("I grew up on the Tissue farm and I attended Bear Run school as a girl" rather than "Mrs. Taylor grew up on the Tissue farm and she later attended Bear Run School") In addition to being concise, the use of the first person avoids the excessive use of proper names and personal pronouns, which can quickly become confusing.

Approximate time to catalog an oral history tape: 4.5 hours per hour of tape.

**Project Goal 8:
Properly house the
interviews in the
Fallingwater archive**

Transcription

A complete transcription is an absolute word-for-word rendering of the tape-recorded interview. Although the transcriber may use some discretion in editing out false starts and filler expressions (“umm” and “you know”), every effort is made to record the speaker’s exact words in written form. Although researchers generally prefer transcriptions when working with oral history materials, their use does raise questions: full transcriptions are extremely labor intensive, and they replace the cassette tape as the primary document of the interview. Can a typewritten page ever replace the nuance and subtlety of the spoken word as recorded on tape? Can a transcription ever be truly accurate?

Approximate time to catalog an oral history tape: 8 to 10 hours per hour of tape.

The Fallingwater Oral History Project is to be housed as a collection in the climate-controlled storage building at Fallingwater. The cassette tapes are archivally stable and filed with all supporting documents in file pockets in a plastic core box.

The supporting documents have not been transferred onto acid-free paper since the cassette tape is the primary document. Also, one of the supporting documents is a release form, signed by the interviewee, which is on Fallingwater stationery and not acid-free.

Typical contents of an oral history file:

- cassette tape of interview
- narrator/fieldworker data form
- release form signed by interviewee
- correspondence between interviewer and interviewee
- photographs and negatives
- index/catalog form

Project Goal 9: Continuation of the project

Although the construction era is rapidly passing out of living memory, the era of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and early interpretive efforts at Fallingwater are ripe for an oral history project.

Each farm that is now owned by the WPC has a story behind it.

The goal for this internship was not to conduct a self-contained oral history project, but rather to incorporate an oral history approach into Fallingwater's on-going operations. Although I have had the luxury of devoting my full attention to identifying resource persons and conducting interviews, the skills to do this work are present in the existing interpretive staff. cursory training on the recording equipment and some basic familiarization with approaches to interviewing and documentation are all that are needed for Fallingwater staff to conduct oral history interviews in the future. The best training is to embark on some interviews and learn from the experience.

Recommendations for continuation of oral history work at Fallingwater:

- With over 100,000 visitors each year, a number of people come through the house who have significant connections to Fallingwater and/or the Kaufmann family. Continue to have the tour guide staff identify these people as they go through their tour. At minimum, a Potential Resource Person form should be filled out so an interview can be conducted at a later date. Ideally, the recording equipment should be kept accessible so at least a cursory interview can be conducted that day, while the person is on site.
- The reservations staff was especially helpful in passing word on to me when people with Fallingwater connections were visiting the house. Have them notify a contact person on the guide staff when someone is coming so an interview may be arranged.
- Continue to solicit potential interviewees at Fayette County Day and other local events.
- Get word out in the community via feature articles based on interviews that have been conducted so far. Some exposure in Pittsburgh may scare up people with connections to the Kaufmann family.
- Expand focus of the project to more systematically identify people associated with the Kaufmann, Speyer, and Blumenthal families, as well as with Wright.
- Although the construction era is rapidly passing out of living memory, the era of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and early interpretive efforts at Fallingwater are ripe for an oral history project. Each farm that is now owned by WPC has a story behind it.
- We decided that the timing was not right this summer for a staff in-service in oral history method and/or project results. It's still a good idea and should be done when the timing is better.

Project Goal 10: Dissemination of project results

How might this material be used?

The following methods were discussed as means of disseminating project results:

- *An article for the Friends of Fallingwater newsletter.* I will write an 800-word article focussing on a particular aspect of the oral history project, not a project overview, but a specific story that has emerged from the work done so far. There are a number of angles which may be pursued.
- *A community event involving project informants.* An event was tentatively scheduled for this September 1997, but canceled due to inadequate preparation time. It makes sense to me to do an event in conjunction with the existing Fayette County Day in November. We discussed doing a narrative stage. This is still a possibility, but I'm not sure we have an adequate number of willing narrators. A smaller event, for the benefit of the staff, could be held where small groups of interested people could question project participants directly about their experiences at Fallingwater. Have a number of panels: Working for the Kaufmanns, Growing Up At Fallingwater, Life on Bear Run.
- *Creating a project summary sheet.* Initially envisioned as a brochure for the community day, the plan is now to create a one-page publication for Fallingwater staff summarizing project results to date, listing project participants, and including quotes and photos of participants. Could be expanded as a publication for the general public.

Additional dissemination ideas:

- A booklet could be published, with the theme "Life on Bear Run." It could include not just reminiscences of construction of and life at Fallingwater, but also life in the Bear Run community: Bear Run school and church, life on farms that are now WPC property, recipes from Elsie Henderson, etc. Such a publication could be of interest to both area residents and Fallingwater visitors.

Although exhibition space is limited at Fallingwater, the above information could also make an effective display board-type exhibition. If not displayed at Fallingwater,

A general use of the oral history materials gathered to date: tying the house to the surrounding vernacular landscape.

perhaps at the Ohiopyle Community Center or some other community location. Also feed to local media as potential feature stories.

- A minimal use of the information gathered to date is to use the names as an informal advisory board. When questions about specific aspects of the house come up, contact the oral history project participants for additional information. Could be useful in formation of final landscape management report.
- Create interpretive materials for the Bear Run Nature Preserve. This is not pristine wilderness: tell the story of the farms and homesteads that once were here. Use local names for trails and features on the land.
- Research the history of the vernacular buildings on the property. There could be brief historical write-ups available to guests at the Farm House and log cabin, as well as possibly the Friend and Mountain Houses. Such research could also lay the groundwork for National Register nominations for these properties. Perhaps a group nomination for the entire preserve/Kaufmann estate?
- Create a slide show/speaker's bureau presentation on the theme "The Local Story Behind a National Landmark" as a local public relations effort.

Use the group photo of local workers in front of the guest house, donated by Gene Work. (Rudy Anderson is also sending a copy of a similar photo). Use this along with pristine photos of the finished house: as a postcard, in future publications about Fallingwater, in future brochures. It effectively conveys local efforts in the creation of Fallingwater.

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Harris, Leon. *Merchant Princes: An Intimate History of Jewish Families Who Built Great Department Stores*. New York: Harper & Row.

Oral History Method (in order of usefulness for Fallingwater)

Ives, Edward D. 1974. *The Tape-Recorded Interview*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Deceptively simple. If you only read one book about oral history, this is the one. An excellent source, with practical advice for interviewing and processing. A more recent edition is available. I donated a copy of the 1974 edition to Fallingwater, it is in the oral history project box. Also check with University of Tennessee Press: there is an excellent video version that is good for training staff.

Jackson, Bruce. 1987. *Fieldwork*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Takes off where Ives leaves off. More detailed technical information, as well as theoretical and ethical considerations. Includes information on photography and video recording. I photocopied Jackson's chapter on interviewing, it is in the oral history project box.

*Allen, Barbara and Lynwood Montell. 1981. *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History.

Good discussion of how to use oral materials in research projects. Information on testing oral sources for accuracy and using oral sources to augment the "official" record. (I studied oral history with Lynwood Montell and was his graduate assistant.)

Richie, Donald. 1995. *Doing Oral History*. New York: Twayne Publishers.

Straightforward, practical advice on all aspects of planning and implementing an oral history project.

* indicates availability from PA Association of Museums and Historical Organizations' lending library.

A National Landmark,

**A Local
Story . . .**

***some final thoughts
on Fallingwater and
its place in local
memory***

Fallingwater is a modern icon . . . a masterpiece of organic architecture . . . the purest expression of Frank Lloyd Wright's singular genius . . . a shrine, sought out by over one hundred thousand visitors annually. . .

Fallingwater is also isolated. Nestled in the rural Laurel Highlands of Southwestern Pennsylvania, the famous house built over a waterfall gains impact from the juxtaposition of its daring, innovative design with its remote location. Yet it would be incorrect to interpret the house as a work of art plopped down in the “middle of nowhere.” The house is fundamentally related to its site, both in its ingenious use of native materials and the place it holds in local memory.

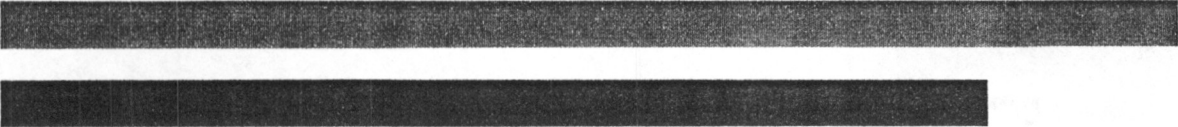
Long before Pittsburgh department store mogul Edgar J. Kaufmann built his now-famous vacation home there, the waterfall at Bear Run and the surrounding landscape were known and used by local residents. As sites for hunting, trapping, and fishing. As a source for timber, coal, and stone. As a working agricultural area, actively farmed and grazed. As places for swimming, recreation, and courtship. Built not in pristine wilderness but in an altogether human landscape, the building of Fallingwater is but one in a series of adaptations made to a particular spot on the map.

The Fallingwater Oral History Project seeks to document the role local residents played in the creation and maintenance of an icon of modern architecture. Fallingwater is without a doubt the work of architectural genius, but it is also a product of its time and place: Depression-era rural Pennsylvania.

A landscape by itself can only provide clues to the story of a place: crumbling foundations, overgrown roadbeds, quarry scars. Human memory fleshes the story out. By talking to the builders and maintainers of a place, much can be learned about what a place means to those who most intimately use and know it.

Fallingwater Oral History Project

Appendix: Project Documents

- 
- *Master Contact List
 - *Potential Resource Person Form
 - *Donor Form
 - *Donor Form (artifact)
 - *Narrator Fieldworker Data Form
 - *Index/Catalog Sample
 - *Newspaper Clippings

Final Project Report
1997 AHDC Internship Program

Fallingwater Oral History Project * Master Contact List

Name	Phone #	Address	Area of Knowledge	Comments
Rudy Anderson <i>i</i>			One of Walter hall's "boys", came to FW and worked on both main house and guest house. Carpentry and from work.	Interviewed 7/8/97. Has some photos.
Chuck Apple <i>i</i>			Grandmother Ethel Clinton-Apple, secretary to Kaufmann sr. and jr.	He is to call me back about setting up an interview
Lois Alviar		Ohiopyle	Grandfather was a stonemason	called
Jim Bachman <i>i</i>		Pittsburgh, PA	Cousin to Liliame K, farm in Mill Run, helped w/FW construction.	Interviewed 7/28/97
Dorothy Barron <i>i</i>		Mt. Pleasant, PA	Visited FW "illicitly" in 1938. Father was a chauffeur and knew K's chauffeur	Interviewed 7/18/97. Need to send her copy of tape
Wendell Burnsworth <i>i</i>		Canton, Ohio	Stone mason - did work in early phases of FW. Currently lives in Canton, OH. His granddaughter, Faye Burnsworth of Ohiopyle gave me the phone #. Inez Scarlett-Trecher kept time sheets for the workers. R C, Orville, John, Paul, and Dewey Miller also worked early in the project.	Will contact him for an interview when I'm in Ohio. Wife is Carol
Custer, Nelson		Dawson	Lived on K's dairy farm prior to Sparks family. Other children. Melville, Dorothy, D.L.	Spoke to his wife, he is deceased and siblings are not in area
Dahl, Dorothy			Referred by Leola Miner. Sister to Ralph Hay.	
Ed Danko <i>i</i>		Uniontown, PA	Trapped furs for Kaufmanns. His WWII diary was published by PSU. He was also interviewed for a documentary along with Pat Hall.	Interviewed 7/11/97. Follow-up? Loaned me video tapes of documentary footage
Walter Detling <i>i</i>		White Oak, PA	Grandfather (John Peter Detling) was a stone mason at Kaufmann estate.	Interviewed 7/21/97.
Jim Eichler <i>i</i>		Port Allegany, PA	Did masonry work on guest house.	Interviewed 7/8/97. Has large photo collection
Bernice Felton <i>i</i>			Lived on farm across from FW	Has been in hospital, will call back to schedule interview. Steve Clark's grandmother. Interviewed 7/24/97
Elsie (Harbaugh) Fike <i>i</i>		Farmington, PA	Cleaned for Kaufmanns (jr)	Interviewed 7/24/97 @ 2:00.
Charles Firestone		Connellsville	Father was K's dairyman	
Dessie Firestone			HUSBAND was K's dairyman	In nursing home
Jean Friday		Elizabeth, PA	Great Uncle was Charley Harlan, who did carpentry work at Fallingwater	Referred by Mrs. Detling
Earl Friend <i>i</i>		Ohiopyle, PA	Maintenance superintendent emeritus	Preliminary interview 7/16/97, follow-up needed. Has photographs.
Emma Gleason		Farmington, PA	Father a metal worker, remembers swimming at FW w/ Pat Hall	Telephoned, gave me phone numbers for brothers, Ernest and Gene King
George H. Green, Elizabeth (Joey) Green <i>i</i>		North, Carlisle, PA	Son of George Green the gardener	Interviewed 7/27/97
Gregory Green		Mechanicsburg	Grandson of Geo Green	
Mrs. I N Hagan			Interview her about her interactions w/ FW?	
Ray Hall, jr <i>i</i>		Port Allegany, PA	Grandfather was FW contractor Walter J. Hall. Recently inherited Lyn Hall from step-mother estate after lengthy court battle.	Interviewed 7/9/97
Roy E. Hall <i>i</i>		Connellsville, PA	Trapped for K's. They liked skunks.	Interviewed 7/18/97
Ralph Hay			Susan Meyers' dad	
Elsie Henderson <i>i</i>		Pittsburgh PA 15206	Cooked for Kaufmanns	Talked to her on telephone, need to schedule interview
Ernest King		Chalk Hill	Helped his father w/ metal work	Telephoned, declined to be interviewed
Gene King			Youngest son, helped father w/ metal work	Spoke to wife, need to call back
Bob Hensel		Mill Run	Worked on Kaufmann estate, janitor?	Spoke to Donna Hensel, said she'd pass my number on since Bob's # is unlisted.

Name	Phone #	Address	Area of Knowledge	Comments
Virginia Kessler <i>i</i>		Mill Run	Father and brothers worked at FW, attended Bear Run School	Interviewed 7/3/97
Harrie F. Lewis <i>i</i>			Worked for EJK in 1940s and 50s. Now retired from NY architectural publishing firm. On Sue Rugg's tour	Need to get back to him to set up phone interview.
Norma Liston		Mill Run	Oakie Harbaugh – her father (?) – worked at FW Mother was Gertrude	
Gladys Livingston <i>i</i>		Mill Run	Ran Livingston's store Mother boarded FW workers.	Interview scheduled, 7/22/97 10:00 AM
Pat Long <i>i</i>		Mill Run	Jesse Hall's daughter.	Initially agreed, but declined to be interviewed on second call May agree to informal interview?
Dorothy McAllister			Daughter of chauffeur "Mac" MacAllister, she grew up at FW and attended Bear Run school.	
Ruth McVay <i>i</i>		Mill Run	Father worked on FW	Interviewed 7/7/97
Mendelson, Joan		Pittsburgh	Relative of Speyers	Name from Jim Bachman
Leola Miner <i>i</i>		Miner	Husband/father Ralph Miner was FW caretaker	Interviewed w/ Denise Miner, 8/14/97
Donna Miner				
Ohler, Alverta			Second wife to Herbert Ohler	
Albert Bearl Ohler <i>i</i>		Connellsville, PA	Brother of Louis and Harry Ohler, father was Herbert Ohler, caretaker at FW. Worked at FW as a young man	Interviewed 8/8/97
Dorothy Ohler (Miss) <i>i</i>			Attended Bear Run School	
Dorothy Ohler (Mrs) <i>i</i>		Mill Run, PA	Fallingwater neighbor, husband and father-in-law worked for K's	Interviewed 7/1/97, follow-up?
Peg Omdorff <i>i</i>		Ohioptyle	Mother cooked for FW workers	Interviewed 6/26/97
Emma Lou (Firestone) Pletcher <i>i</i>		Mill Run	Lived in farm house before Sparks Father was dairyman.	Will contact her week of July 28 for interview. Spoke to her on phone, she preferred not to be interviewed.
Sidney Prinkey <i>i</i>			Worked on FW	Spoke to his wife, he declined to be interviewed
Ruth Ravenscroft <i>i</i>		Ohioptyle	Father was Jess Hall's brother – laborer at FW. Friends with Pat Long.	Set up several interviews, but she had to cancel. Get back to her in the fall.
Bill Scarlett <i>i</i>		Mill Run PA 15464	Margaret Taylor's brother, mother cleaned for K's	
Sparks			Father was K's dairyman	Byrle Younkin's brother
Florence Shearer		Mill Run	Widow of Lauren Shearer	
Iris Steyer <i>i</i>		Mill Run	Father Ira, Uncle Wes Herman worked at FW—construction and digging stone. They were stone masons	
Margaret Taylor <i>i</i>		Maple Summit Rd	Secretary to Walter Hall	Interviewed 7/11/97
Merle Taylor <i>i</i>		Maple Summit Rd.	Worked on FW and for Kaufmanns	Interviewed 7/11/97
Roy Taylor <i>i</i>		Connellsville	His mother, Charity Lorraine (Shaw) Taylor cleaned for the Kaufmanns in the 1930s. Her sister, Jane Shaw, also did. His father, Archie Taylor (d. 1970) of A.W. Taylor Plastering, did work on the dairy barn. "Inside of Kaufmann's barn was nicer than a lot of people's houses "	Mr Taylor is a councilman in Connellsville His mother is in a nursing. He will try to interview her and his aunt in the next few weeks and donate the tapes to FW. Gave him Sarah's name and # to follow up. Very helpful and enthusiastic about helping. Saw article in paper
Charlotte Thomas <i>i</i>		5361 Pearl Drive, Chincoteague, VA 23336	Visited Fallingwater with uncle, John Towns, an engineer who took measurements of FW.	Photos and letter in archives. Interviewed 8/7/97
James Watt <i>i</i> (Niece, Delores Purodec 437-0182)		Hopwood, PA	Did landscape work for Kaufmanns	Interview scheduled for Tuesday, 7/22/97. Wasn't feeling well, niece will call when he's feeling better.
Gene Work <i>i</i>		Mill Run	Did construction work at FW – guest house.	Interviewed 8/7/97. Lent be pictures to copy. Has more photos.

Name	Phone #	Address	Area of Knowledge	Comments
Glenn Work i		Mill Run	On construction crew at FW.	Interviewed 7/27/97
Grayden Work ☎ d		Mill Run		
Beryl Younkin i		Normalville, PA	Father was Kaufmann's dairyman, played often @ FW with Pat Hall and Dorothy McAllister	Interviewed 7/18/97

Key:

i = interview conducted **☎** = telephoned, interview not scheduled

☎ i = telephoned, interview pending

☎ d = telephoned, declined to be interviewed

Fallingwater Oral History Project Potential Resource Person

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER: (____) _____ (____) _____
home work

BEST TIME TO CALL: _____

OCCUPATION: _____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____

When did you work at Fallingwater?

What did you do?

Do you have any photographs or documents regarding Fallingwater which we could see?

Do you know anyone else with Fallingwater stories whom we should contact?



THANK YOU for participating in the Fallingwater Oral History Project. The information you have provided will undoubtedly prove invaluable to future scholars, historians and other interested parties. By signing below, you give permission for the materials collected in this oral history interview to be preserved for perpetuity in the Fallingwater archives, allowing future generations to better understand the unique circumstances that led to the creation of a modern architectural masterpiece, as well as daily life as it was lived there.

The story of Fallingwater is a fascinating one, and we appreciate your willingness to share with us the part you played in it.

In consideration of the work the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is doing to collect and preserve material of value for the study of ways of life past and present at Fallingwater and the surrounding area, I would like to deposit with them for their use the items listed below:

I understand that the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy will use these materials as part of its historic collection. By signing below, I give my permission to incorporate into Fallingwater's archives any tape recordings and/or photographs made of me by Fallingwater researchers. Possible future uses of these materials include their use as reference materials for the creation of educational materials, exhibitions, or publications. Likewise, The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy may, at the discretion of its staff, allow qualified scholars to listen to and quote from the tapes in connection with their research or for other educational purposes.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Signature of interviewer/witness: _____ Date: _____

For the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy _____

Name/Title: _____ Date: _____

WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA CONSERVANCY
Fallingwater
Mill Run, PA 15464

NARRATOR / FIELDWORKER DATA FORM

I. NARRATOR

NAME: _____

*Include fullest possible name – first, middle, and maiden (if applicable). For example: John James Smith,
 Mary Ann (Franklin) Smith*

SPOUSE'S NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ Phone: _____

PERSONAL DATA: Age _____ Date of Birth _____

Place of birth _____ Sex _____

Places of habitation _____

Occupation(s) _____

CONNECTION TO FALLINGWATER: _____

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, as applicable (education, religious affiliation, nationality, etc.)

II. COLLECTOR

NAME: _____ BIRTH YEAR: _____

RELATIONSHIP TO NARRATOR (cousin, acquaintance, friend, etc.): _____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: _____

Fallingwater Oral History Project Interview Index

Tape number: OH-97-26

Name of interviewee: **Albert Bearl Ohler**
 Address: **South Connellsville, PA**
 Phone #: **(123) 456-7890**

Date of birth: **1923** Place of Birth: **Fayette County** Age: **74**

Name of interviewer: **Brian Gregory**
 Date of interview: **8/8/97** Place of interview: **Ohler home**
 Other persons present at interview: **Mrs. Ohler**

Tape type: video ; audio X
 Recorder model: **Marantz** Tape (brand and length): **TDK 90 minutes**
 Amount used (side 1): 45 ; (side 2):

Summary description of interview context and contents:

Albert Bearl Ohler's father was Herbert Ohler, the caretaker at the Kaufmann estate before and during the time Fallingwater was built. [Note: Mr. Ohler is known as Bearl in Bear Run, but people in Connellsville know him as Albert.] Bearl was the youngest of three boys and has fond memories of growing up along Bear Run. He helped with the construction of Fallingwater as a teenager, carrying hot tar and water to the site.

The Ohlers left the Kaufmann estate between the building of Fallingwater and the guesthouse. Ohler moved to Connellsville and worked for many years as a maintenance man at the hospital there.

The interview was conducted in Ohler's kitchen. Mrs. Ohler was present, and the sound of their dog can be heard in the background. Mr. Ohler said he is "not much of a talker," but he agreed to be interviewed anyway. Referred by his sister-in-law, Dorothy Ohler.

This document is an INDEX of an oral history interview. The meter numbers are from a Panasonic transcribing machine and may differ from readings on other models. The cassette tape remains the primary document and should be referred to for all direct quotations.

(Albert) BEARL OHLER
OH-97-26

Meter # Index

- 000 sound check
- 009 opening announcement
- 013 Father was Herbert Ohler, caretaker at FW
- 016 Youngest of three brothers
- 018 Grew up on Kaufmann estate. "It was wonderful, a nice place. Cool, and a nice trout stream to fish in, it was really nice.
- 020 Lived in camping area, a couple hundred yards from new house.
- 026 Speyer family lived in the Stone Cottage, right below where Ohlers lived.
- 030 Summer Camp was still in operation when he was growing up.
- 034 Store employees came during the summer months.
- 035 Duties of his father as caretaker: 4 or 5 people worked for him. Maintained cottages, at one time there were a dozen or more in one row.
- 044 Had to get cottages set up for visitors: stocked with ice, etc.
- 049 There was a farm above the main camp area.
- 055 Kaufmanns owned what is now Hay farm.
- 058 Kaufmanns came just about every weekend.
- 061 Mr. Kaufmann a nice guy. Mrs. Kaufmann had a different personality.
- 065 Visitors to FW mostly hiked. Swam in swimming pool, one at guesthouse, one near gardeners cottage.
- 072 Kaufmanns had a cottage "more like a house" that they lived in before FW was built. Above the creek.
- 079 Lived on the property during construction of FW. Was a water boy on the job.

- 080 Got a dollar a day.
- 083 Hauled water from a spring 300 or 400 yards away. 14 or 15 years old at the time.
- 088 Hired everybody they could get. Seventy-five workers.
- 094 Walter Hall was foreman.
- 101 Was present during building of main house, not guesthouse.
- 102 Stone quarry on site, 125 yards from house. A hard rock. Inch and a half to three or four inches thick.
- 106 One quarry quarried rock, one dressed and sent them to the house for the bricklayers and stone layers.
- 109 Kaufmann sent an old truck up to the house -- flatbed on it -- with solid rubber tires.
- 119 Brought water to the site for drinking, not mixing concrete.
- 123 Dammed creek below bridge for mixing concrete. Creek was bigger then. Cut their own ice from reservoir. Kept all summer in the icehouse.
- 132 Mountain streams used to have more water in them.
- 136 Attended school at Bear Run.
- 140 Used to be another school up near the church.
- 143 About 18 or twenty students in the school.
- 146 Ohlers only ones who lived on site. The Firestone family took care of the farm and lived up there.
- 152 On Ohler's crew: Arthur Friend, Dick Scarlett, Dan Stahl (uncle, part time). Usually four or five worked on the crew.
- 165 No timbering at that time. "Kaufmann didn't want a little branch cut. Pretty particular about that."
- 176 Property was posted and patrolled for poachers. Father was deputized to arrest poachers. Hired a man on horseback to patrol stream.
- 191 After FW built, old house was kept for awhile.
- 199 Nothing was at waterfall before FW built.

203 Born in 1923.

205 Lived at property until about 16 years old.

END OF INTERVIEW

Friday, July 25, 1997 5

The Daily Courier

FAY-WEST NEWS

Fallingwater creating oral history

Fallingwater, the famous house built over a waterfall at Bear Run by architect Frank Lloyd Wright, is seeking and recording experiences of area residents who have some connection to the landmark.

Brian Gregory, a summer intern, will conduct interviews of those who have had any connection to the house since it was built 62 years ago. The oral recordings will become a part of Fallingwater's archives.

The project is looking for individuals with a wide variety of experiences, from building the house and working with the Kaufmann family to those who may have just visited on a special occasion. Gregory is also looking for people who have general knowledge of life around Bear Run, 1930s to 1950s.

Those interested in participating should contact Gregory at 329-5754 or send a note to him at Post Office Box R, Mill Run, Pa. 15464.

Fay-West

Input sought

The state Department of Public Welfare will hold several hearings statewide to receive input from the public on how the department should operate the 1997-98 Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

A public hearing will be held Aug. 19, from 10 a.m. to noon, in the County Courthouse Gold Room, 436 Grant St., Pittsburgh.

Anyone wishing to offer testimony should call 717-772-7919 or 717-772-7909. To obtain the department's proposed LIHEAP program for 1997-98, call the Fayette County Assistance Office at 439-7015.

Oral history

This summer, officials at Fallingwater are beginning a community oral history project, seeking to record the experiences of area residents who have some connection to the famous house. Brian Gregory, a summer intern at Fallingwater, will conduct oral history interviews. The interviews will become part of Fallingwater's archives. For more information, call 329-5754.